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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by Stichting Global Human Rights Defence, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[22 August 2023]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



Enforced Disappearances in Sindh, Pakistan

Stitching Global Human Rights Defence would like to draw the attention of Council to a deeply concerning issue that has plagued our homeland and demands global attention - the alarming rate of enforced disappearances in Sindh, Pakistan. This statement aims to highlight the grave human rights violations and the culture of impunity surrounding these disappearances and to request the esteemed United Nations Human Rights Council to take necessary actions to address this pressing concern.

Enforced Disappearances: A Growing Menace

Human rights activists, civil society workers, and Sindhi nationalists in Pakistan are being subjected to enforced disappearances disproportionately higher than other segments of the population. This disconcerting trend points to a systematic violation of fundamental human rights. We present evidence that underscores this distressing reality.

According to data compiled by The Voice of Missing Persons of Sindh, the number of recorded disappearances in recent years is cause for great concern. In 2019, 30 cases were documented; in 2020, this number surged to 99; 47 cases in 2021, 83 cases in 2022, and over 60 Sindhi individuals have been kidnapped in the seven months up to July 2023. These escalating figures represent an undeniable pattern of targeted actions against the Sindhi people.

Culture of Impunity and Failed Accountability Measures

Central to the issue of enforced disappearances is the culture of impunity that exists within Pakistan's state apparatus. The lack of accountability for offenders has severely hindered efforts to rectify this grave violation of human rights. There has been a failure to hold perpetrators accountable for these heinous acts, despite openly knowing of the involvement of state agencies in such crimes.

Furthermore, we draw the attention of Council to the proposed alarming changes to the Criminal Laws (Amendment) Bill 2021 by Pakistan's Parliamentary Committee on the Interior (PCI). Rather than curb the menace of enforced disappearances, these changes have facilitated the intimidation of victim advocates and institutionalised impunity for state agents, perpetuating the cycle of violence and abuse. Several amendment bills passed in the Pakistan Federal Assembly in August 2023, such as the Pakistan Army Amendment Bill and Officials Secrets Amendment Bill 2023, provide legislative support to enter and abduct anyone, anytime, without providing recourse to legal help. The Bills were rushed through without due appraisal by a parliament that dismantled within a week of their passing. The tyranny is that on August 20th, 2023, President Dr Arif Alvi stated on Twitter that he swears by God that he differs with these Bills and has not signed them. This is completely unimaginable in any democratic country and demonstrates how Pakistanis run.

Inadequate Response from State Institutions

Efforts made by human rights organisations, victims, and some courts to address enforced disappearances have been met with insufficient cooperation, particularly from the military and related security agencies. The Sindh High Court, other provincial high courts, the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances (COIED), and the Supreme Court of Pakistan have all conducted hearings on this matter. Yet, cases still need to be solved due to a lack of cooperation from these key entities.

Established in 2010 with the intention of addressing disappearances and locating missing individuals, the COIED has yet to meet expectations. The figures speak for themselves: within six years of its establishment, the COIED located 982 missing persons, yet 1,273 others remained unaccounted for according to their figures. This disparity is a clear indication of the shortcomings of the Commission, especially considering that local human rights organisations documented significantly more cases of enforced disappearances than the COIED officially acknowledged.

Call for United Nations Intervention

Faced with these distressing facts, we request the United Nations Human Rights Council to investigate all cases of enforced disappearances in Sindh. The Council must stress the urgency of this situation to the relevant authorities in Pakistan, urging them to ratify the International Convention on Enforced Disappearances (CED) and enact federal legislation that unequivocally supports the implementation of CED obligations.

We implore that such legislation must unequivocally end the practice of impunity for state agents responsible for enforced disappearances. Additionally, it should extend its protective reach to journalists, political workers, activists, and their families, safeguarding them from being targeted and silenced. This legislation must reflect the core principles of human rights, justice, and accountability.

The relentless wave of enforced disappearances in Sindh, Pakistan, is a violation of the principles of humanity that demands immediate and sustained international attention. We stand united with the human rights groups, victims, and their families in urging the United Nations Human Rights Council to take decisive actions to ensure justice, accountability, and the protection of the rights of the Sindhi people and all affected individuals. We trust that the Council will heed our call and work towards realising a world where human rights are respected and justice prevails.
