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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by Centre for Human Rights and Peace Advocacy, 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.

[21 August 2023]

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



Urgent Human Rights Concerns in Pakistan, Azad Kashmir, Pakistan Administered Kashmir, and Gilgit-Baltistan: A Plea for the United Nations Human Rights Council Intervention

Centre for Human Rights and Peace Advocacy (CHRAPA) is deeply concerned about the human rights situation in Pakistan and Azad Kashmir, Pakistan-Administered Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan. This alarming state of human rights needs urgent attention from UN. Despite Pakistan's claims of effectively controlling extremist groups, free roaming of extremist groups, misuse of Blasphemy laws, attacks on religious minorities and their holy places, witch-hunting of pro-independence Kashmiris, rights activists and journalists, the ongoing instances of atrocities and abuses portray a significantly different and contrasting reality.

Centre for Human Rights and Peace Advocacy (CHRAPA) seeks attention of UN to the abduction of 22 teenage boys by extremist factions, the increasing influence of radical jirgas, the erosion of individual freedoms, and the systematic targeting of activists.

Disturbing revelation during a press conference by Maulana Khalil President Traders Organisation Bagh, 22 teenage boys from religious schools in Bagh, Azad Kashmir, Pakistan-Administered Kashmir, have been forcibly taken by international designated banned extremist groups for armed training and so-called Jihad. These incidents shed light on the deep-rooted issue of extremist influence within the region. Families and loved ones of the abducted teenagers are left in anguish, as their whereabouts remain unknown. This blatant abduction highlights the grave human rights crisis unfolding under Pakistani authorities.

The emergence of radical jirgas and extremist groups, seen in different areas like Rawalakot, Poonch Azad Kashmir, Pakistan-Administered Kashmir reflects oppressive methods witnessed in regions like Wana and FATA in recent decades. These jirgas operate with full support from military and secret agencies, functioning independently from police and judicial oversight. This blatant disregard for the rule of law is a direct violation. The deep state acts as a state above the state, making arbitrary decisions and denying justice to victims. This unchecked power has enabled these groups to impose their radical religious beliefs and lifestyles on the local population through coercion and fear. Extremist groups go beyond legal boundaries, intruding into personal lives and community events. They disrupt everyday activities, including weddings, funerals, and burials. Women, especially, are targeted, facing threats that limit their mobility and freedom. This creates an environment of fear, where personal freedoms are restricted by armed enforcers of extremist ideologies.

These concerns are serious and must not be disregarded. It is imperative for the UN to take urgent action against these violations.

Furthermore, Pro-independence Kashmiris and rights activists face severe threats, harassment, and even elimination. The assassination of Sardar Arif Shahid, the chairman of the All Parties National Alliance APNA, on May 13, 2013, underscores the risks faced by those advocating for autonomy and human rights. The perpetrators behind this heinous crime remain at large, exemplifying the climate of impunity that fosters such attacks on dissenting voices.

In June 2023, a migrant boat disaster occurred in Greece, where it is believed that up to 750 people were on board a fishing vessel that departed from Libya. Hundreds are missing, including 133 individuals from Azad Kashmir, Pakistan-Administered Kashmir.

This is an unimaginable tragedy that exposes the dire circumstances faced by numerous individuals, including Kashmiris from Azad Kashmir, Pakistan-Administered Kashmir. These individuals have been forced to leave their homelands in pursuit of employment and sustenance to provide for their families. The lack of viable job opportunities and sustainable industries in the region, re-emergence of radical groups, narcoterrorism, witch-hunting of nationalists and rights activists has undeniably compelled youth to embark on perilous journeys, with each step laden with uncertainty and danger.

The “Azad Jammu and Kashmir state Subject Rule of 1927” was introduced to safeguard local rights. However, this rule has been systematically violated by Pakistan in its administered regions, as it disregards the cultural and political aspirations of the Kashmiri people and changes the demographics of the regions.

Azad Kashmir, Pakistan-Administered Kashmir and Gilgit Baltistan, once celebrated for their natural beauty and tranquil landscapes, have become victims of a dire human rights concern—land grabbing by Pakistan's military and law enforcement agencies. This aggressive land grabbing encompasses the occupation of natural tourist resorts, hilltops, and forested areas. The military has established a formidable presence in these regions, erecting fences, barbed wire, and notice boards that forbid entry beyond specific points. Such measures infringe upon the fundamental rights of the local population to access and enjoy their own lands and resources. Locals are no longer able to freely enjoy the beauty of their surroundings, and their livelihoods have been severely disrupted.

Forests have been encroached upon, and ecosystems have been disrupted, leading to irreversible environmental damage. The unchecked expansion of military infrastructure has resulted in deforestation, pollution, and disturbance of wildlife habitats. This not only threatens the local biodiversity but also has long-term implications for climate resilience, the overall health of these fragile ecosystems and region's peace and stability.

On 16th August 2023 another tragic incident was witnessed in Jaranwala Faisalabad Pakistan when a mob torched several churches, ransacked Christian homes and vandalised a graveyard. The apparent provocation for this assault was blasphemy, as the house of a Christian man allegedly involved in the offence was razed.

Clearly, in Pakistan, evidence is not required where the issue of blasphemy is concerned, and mobs take it upon themselves to dispense ‘justice’. (1)

On August 07, 2023 a teacher affiliated with a language centre was shot dead by unknown armed men on an allegation of blasphemy in Turbat town of Kech district, Balochistan Pakistan.

Police said Abdul Rauf, 22, an English teacher, was targeted near a graveyard in the Malikabad area when he, accompanied by some people, was going to attend a jirga of ulema to explain his position on the matter of alleged Blasphemy. (2)

A concerning situation has unfolded in recent months as dozens of Kashmiris residing in Pakistan are systematically targeted and killed. Shockingly, not a single culprit has been arrested or punished for these heinous acts.

On April 30, 2023, Nazar Hussain Qureshi, the son of Khaki Qureshi from Mang Azad Kashmir, lost his life to a fatal shooting in Bahria Town, Islamabad. This incident highlights the ongoing violence targeting Kashmiris in Pakistan, sparking anger within the population. (3)

Another tragic incident involved the targeted killing of Sardar Amjad Ishaq, a Kashmiri District and Session Judge from Rawalakot, Azad Kashmir, Pakistan-Administered Kashmir. He was serving as a judge in Mirpur, Azad Kashmir, Pakistan-Administered Kashmir. On May 29th, 2023, he was tragically shot dead at his residence in Bahria Town, Rawalpindi, Pakistan. (4)

Adding to the distressing trend, another Kashmiri, Nisar Hussain Mughal, was mysteriously killed in Rawalpindi, Pakistan. Nisar was a resident of Neelam Valley, Azad Kashmir, Pakistan-Administered Kashmir, and was involved in business and residing in PWD Colony, Rawalpindi.

In July 2023, a heart-breaking incident occurred in Chaudhary Haveli, Abbaspur, Azad Kashmir, Pakistan-Administered Kashmir. An innocent young girl S. G., the daughter of a poor man, was brutally abducted, raped, and killed. Shockingly, it took several days to file FIR despite clear medical evidence. The police are now hesitant to act against the culprit due to support from influential people.

Kashmiri journalists Majid Afsar and Ejaz Khan reported this case. In response, influential figures, with the support of the police, lodged a FIR against them to pressure and silence them.

Maqsood Kazmi, a resident of Nakar village in Pulangi, Azad Kashmir, Pakistan-Administered Kashmir, was taken into custody by Rawalakot Poonch Azad Kashmir, Pakistan-Administered Kashmir police. Tragically, his dead body was shifted to CMH Hospital and declared a suicide. However, it is evident that this is a clear case of murder, not suicide. Justice is demanded for this inhumane act.

On 16 August 2023 Mueez Taslim, the only son of Assistant Commissioner Revenue Rawalakot Sardar Taslim, was tragically shot dead in Taxila Pakistan. His uncle & cousin also injured.

In light of these grave incidents, our organization urges the United Nations to intervene and ask Pakistan takes appropriate actions to safeguard the lives, property, and liberties of Kashmiris settled within its borders and under its administration. Pakistan should provide adequate compensation to the families of the victims, acknowledging the irreplaceable losses they have suffered, and facilitate their children's education.

Furthermore, Islamabad must arrest all culprits involved in the killings of innocent Kashmiris and bring them to justice.

Centre for Human Rights and Peace Advocacy (CHRAPA) urges UNHRC to given the gravity of the human rights situation in Pakistan, Azad Kashmir. Pakistan-Administered Kashmir, and Gilgit-Baltistan, the UN should initiate an independent investigation into these and other violations, uncover the truth, hold perpetrators accountable, and ensure the safe return of the abducted youth.

Faisalabad's Jaranwala Pakistan a mob torched several churches, ransacked Christian homes and vandalised a graveyard (1)

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1770585/faisalabad-rampage>

Teacher killed on blasphemy allegation in Turbat Balochistan (2)

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1768725>

A security guard deployed at Bahria Town was murdered by a young man (3)

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1750157>

A sessions judge of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) was shot dead by armed robbers over resistance in Rawalpindi (4)

<https://en.dailypakistan.com.pk/30-May-2023/sessions-judge-shot-dead-by-dacoits-over-resistance-in-rawalpindi>