



House Foreign Affairs Committee
Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission

Hearing
on
Pakistan: Ongoing Political Repression

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2255 Rayburn

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Chairman Smith, Chairman McGovern, Members, and Commission staff, thank you for this important hearing. Today, I will discuss legal and physical attacks against religious and ethnic minorities in Pakistan. These human rights violations contribute to the erosion of rule of law for all Pakistanis, creating an environment hostile to all dissent. The crackdown on freedom of association and expression experienced by the [Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf \(PTI\)](#), as described by my colleagues on the panel, should be understood in the context of this larger assault on human rights.

Attacks on Baloch Activists

The Baloch Yakjehti Committee (BYC) has mobilized thousands to peacefully demand justice, accountability, and an end to enforced disappearances. Yet BYC members who attempt to peacefully protest are [arrested](#), while internet and mobile services are routinely suspended and media coverage of the protests is severely restricted. Dr. Mahrang Baloch, chief organizer of the BYC, has been under arbitrary detention alongside five other activists since March 22nd. Meanwhile, the Balochistan assembly recently amended its [provincial anti-terrorism law](#) to allow detention for up to 90 days without charges. The activists could have their detentions extended further under this law. Last week the BYC [announced](#) that its detained activists had been relocated and that their families were being denied access. Dr. Mahrang and the other activists have not been given due process and should be freed.

¹ Drafted in cooperation with [Amnesty International South Asia, Regional Office](#)

The past six months has also seen a marked increase in enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings targeting Baloch activists. Just two weeks ago, BYC member Zeeshan Zaheer was abducted. Eight hours later his [bullet ridden body](#) was dumped. These cases are part of a [systematic attack](#) on the rights of Baloch community.

Attacks on Religious Minorities

For decades, Pakistan's Penal Code has [barred](#) members of the Ahmadi community from calling themselves Muslims or practicing their faith in public. Harassment and restrictions against Ahmadis spiked around Eid last month, when individuals were forced to sign affidavits to refrain from Eid prayers and rituals. Three Ahmadis have been killed since mid-April in apparent targeted attacks. Instead of protecting this community, local authorities have [arrested](#) Ahmadis, including children, outside of their places of worship around Friday prayers. Even the [Lahore High Court Bar](#) has lobbied for restrictions on the community. These institutions should be protecting the rights of religious minorities, not attacking those rights.

Meanwhile, Pakistan's vaguely-worded blasphemy laws are increasingly being weaponized by majoritarian religious groups, while the accused have few means to defend themselves. In [2024](#) alone, 344 new cases were opened following blasphemy allegations. This caused widespread harassment and intimidation against religious minorities, though most cases were against the recognized Muslim community. Ten of those accused of blasphemy last year were extra-judicially killed.

Forced Deportations of Afghan Nationals

In September 2023, the Pakistani government announced a [phased deportation plan](#) targeting Afghan refugees and asylum seekers. Since then, more than a million Afghan nationals have been forcibly returned to Afghanistan. People facing forced return to Afghanistan, including [journalists](#), human rights defenders, [women protestors](#), [artists](#), and former government officials are at imminent risk of persecution and repression by the Taliban.

Those still in Pakistan live in [constant fear](#) of harassment, arbitrary detention and deportation with no due process or lawyers to represent them. Among them are those in the pipeline for U.S. P1, P2, and Special Immigrant Visas (SIV), some of whom fought alongside U.S. forces for 20 years. The harms against Afghans in Pakistan are compounding: Deportation orders and their looming deadlines have made Afghan refugees vulnerable to extortion by officials who demand bribes, and parents are afraid to send their children to school in case they are picked up for deportation. Some of those receiving support from NGOs have had their aid cut due to the freeze in U.S. foreign aid, making them even more vulnerable. Due to the ongoing conditions in Afghanistan and the risks facing those who are returned, any deportation or forced return of Afghans to Afghanistan violates the principle of non-refoulement.

Recommendations

U.S. Congress and the Trump administration should:

1. Call for an end to the harassment, arbitrary detention, and extrajudicial killings of Baloch human rights defenders exercising their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly;
2. Call on the Pakistani authorities to release and drop charges against all Ahmadis detained solely for exercising their human rights, in particular their right to worship freely, and take concrete steps to protect all of these rights;
3. Call on the Pakistani government to repeal all blasphemy laws and laws that discriminate against the Ahmadi community;
4. Reverse the ban on Afghan nationals entering the United States and allow the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) and the State Department's Coordinator for Afghan Relocation Efforts (CARE) office to continue to process P1 and P2 visas and SIVs, fulfilling a bipartisan commitment from Congress to support Afghan allies;
5. Restore temporary protected status for Afghans already in the United States; and
6. Call on the Pakistani government to stop the arbitrary arrests, detentions, and harassment of Afghan nationals, and reverse the decision to forcibly deport Afghan nationals.

Thank you for your commitment to human rights and I welcome your questions.