Statement:

The Human Rights Council of Balochistan has documented a distressing number of 5751 cases of enforced disappearance from January 2016 to June 2023. This data is primarily sourced from seven districts of Balochistan, where we were able to verify the incidents. It is important to note that Balochistan comprises thirty-two administrative districts, so the recorded data represents only a portion of the actual incidents. The districts of Kech, Gwadar, Panjgur, Awaran, Khuzdar, Quetta, Karachi (capital city of Sindh province), and partially Naseerabad and Dera Bugti are the main areas from which this data is gathered.

According to our records, 5559 individuals were forcibly taken by personnel of the paramilitary Frontier Corps (FC), 44 by the Counter-terrorism department (CTD), and in other cases, gunmen in plain clothes, allegedly affiliated with intelligence agencies and armed groups supported by the military and organized by members of the provincial assembly, were responsible for the abductions.

It is deeply concerning that the majority of the disappeared individuals are educated people between the ages of 16 to 55. The younger victims, often students sent by their parents to study in distant colleges and universities, are frequently targeted and subsequently detained unlawfully. In some cases, these disappearances are documented in courts and social media campaigns, thanks to the efforts of fellow students who speak out to seek justice for their abducted friends.

Students from Balochistan are often taken from their hostels in other cities of Pakistan, while those picked up within Balochistan are often abducted during raids on their houses or at military check-posts between villages and towns. Tragically, in some areas like Awaran, every male family member is required to appear at military camps regularly, leading to the unjust detention of many individuals. Shockingly, torture is commonplace, and there have been incidents of deaths resulting from severe mistreatment while in custody.

Most of the victims are breadwinners for their families, holding low-income jobs or self-employment, and their disappearances cause immense suffering for their dependents. Many of these families hail from remote villages with limited access to media, social media, and civil society groups. Consequently, they face significant challenges in seeking help or registering their cases with civil society organizations due to financial constraints.

Disturbingly, notable figures, including members of parliament, attempt to silence the families of missing persons by offering support and promises of bringing back the abductees. Veiled threats are often used, stating that other male family members might be abducted if the issue is raised publicly.

In several cases, gunmen associated with ministers and lawmakers are involved in abductions, keeping victims in custody, and subsequently handing them over to security forces when required. These groups are often led by relatives and family members of politicians who secured their positions through dubious means during past elections.

Law enforcement authorities rarely take action against security forces, and even when cases are filed, they are often directed against unknown individuals. Court cases are complex, with many enforced disappearance cases filed in the high court of Balochistan in Quetta, which poses significant financial challenges for the families involved. Additionally, the Commission on Missing Persons, although present, is non-functional and conducts hearings only in Quetta, further complicating access to justice for victims' families.

Recommendations:

To address this humanitarian crisis, it is essential to keep the family members of the disappeared informed about the status of their loved ones. All victims should be produced before courts of law and provided the right to a fair trial if charges are pressed against them. Additionally, the state must provide support to the families of victims as long as their breadwinners remain in the custody of state forces. Immediate action is required to bring perpetrators to justice and hold them accountable for these grave human rights violations. It is crucial for the government and relevant authorities to take decisive steps in addressing this issue and ensuring the protection of human rights in Balochistan.