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## ***Present State of Human Rights in Pakistan***

The information in this statement has arrived at the ***Interfaith International*** secretariat from various NGO sources within Pakistan (or representing Pakistani nationals) : *World Sindhi Congress* ; *Sindhi Unity Forum (World Sindhi Congress)* ; *Baluchistan Rights Movement* ; *Gilgit Baltistan United Movement* ; *MQM International Secretariat*; *International Kashmir Alliance* ; *United Kashmir People's National Party* ; *ADAL Trust- Action Against Discriminatory Laws* ; *Indo-American Kashmir Forum*, etc.

The general criticism of Pakistan's handling of human rights issues is outlined as follows :

- (1) The prevailing ***dominance of Punjab and Punjabi interests*** (as over against those of other Pakistanis : Sindhis, Baluch, Seraikis, Pashtoon etc.) in dealing with provincial needs and aspirations.
- (2) The failure of the Pakistan central government to provide representative government to '***Azad ' (Pakistani-occupied) Kashmiri peoples*** living in that part of Kashmir, or to provide even minimum parliamentary representation to peoples living in the region of ***Gilgit and Baltistan*** (north of Kashmir).
- (3) the failure of a military government (as exists in Pakistan today) to guarantee the ***free processes of law*** (represented by the judges, lawyers and judicial system) and the interference of the government in the normal life of court procedures (such as, recently, those of the judges who were investigating 'disappeared persons' or those who had been tortured etc.)
- (4) Finally, Pakistan has not freed itself from ***military rule*** and has not been able to diminish the influence of its ***secret services*** (ISI) over the administration of the political and civil life of the country.
- (5) a further problem is the ***intolerance vis à vis religion*** whereby minority religions may be subject to discrimination.

### ***Punjabi domination***

Some government persons in Islamabad have insisted that provinces other than Punjab are '*in need of development*'. On the other hand, in ***Baluchistan***, traditional and respected tribal leaders claim that the so-called *development assistance* is going to Punjabi-origin colonists in Baluchistan. The profit from the port of Gwadar (terminus for oil and gas pipelines from Baluchistan and Central Asia) will go not to the local Baluch people but to Punjabi officials and the central government and not profit the Baluch at all.

For the ***Province of Sindh***, excluding Karachi city, human rights activists point to the failure of Islamabad (with Punjabi interests predominating) to guarantee ***the Indus River ecological system*** upon which Sindhi people depend. Dam projects helpful to Punjab affect the livings and even existence of Sindhis downstream. Mass unemployment, poverty and youth suicide are some of the effects of this discriminatory policy of Pakistan's government. Moreover with the recent alliance between MQM and the government of General Musharraf, the Sindhis in Karachi city have lost many of their perennial prerogatives and privileges (MQM in a coalition now controls the city of Karachi and the whole Province of Sindh).

The ***Baluchistan problem*** is very acute. Islamabad, in order to suppress an armed rebellion there, has bombed civilians and made many arrests. Leaders are kept *incognito* in prison. Efforts have been made to annihilate by bombs, enforced disappearances, imprisonment and harassment of all kinds the three major traditional tribal leaders and their families (the Bugti, Marri and Mengel families). ***Widespread disappearances*** of Baluch leaders might have been brought to light and elucidated through the Pakistan court system, but to prevent this was evidently one of the reasons which lay behind the firing by General Musharraf of the Supreme Court Chief Justice Mr. Chaudry. The Supreme Court High Judge was about to enter upon an investigation of the activities of various prison directors under whose jurisdiction some of the 'disappeared persons' i.e. opponents of General Musharraf, were languishing in prison and no doubt under torture.

In fact, according to most Baluch people, the incorporation of Baluchistan into the state of Pakistan was contrary to the wishes of the majority of Baluch people and this has been the background for ***50 years of struggle for their independence***. Baluchistan was not part of the British Empire and through the king of Kalat Baluch people had bilateral relations with that empire. However, Baluch leaders appear to be willing to remain part of Pakistan today if the riches of their land are ***equitably shared*** between their people and the central government (which is far from being the case). Baluch people are claiming their '***economic, social and cultural rights***', as are the Sindhis and other ethnic and cultural (non-Punjabi) groups in Pakistan today.

Sindhis, likewise, claim that their riches are being exploited by a Punjab-dominated administration and bureaucracy while at the same time Sindh Province provides ***the greatest share of the revenue*** to the whole of Pakistan's administrative costs.

### ***The north- Kashmir, Gilgit and Baltistan***

Islamabad rules 'Azad' ('free', Pakistan-occupied) Kashmir without constitutional guarantees for an autonomous Parliament. Every person who wishes to run for election to the ***Azad Kashmir Parliament*** must sign a statement that he will work for the ***accession of Kashmir to Pakistan***. This complicates the open question of Kashmir's future as an entity. Moreover, the government of 'Azad' Kashmir is under the strict control of officials from Islamabad given the military importance of this area occupied by Pakistan. Many Kashmiris who object to the subordination of their area to direct rule have fled Kashmir and live abroad. They have joined together with exiles from India-occupied Kashmir to create the ***International Kashmir Alliance (IKA)*** which has been struggling for several years for ***a Pakistani-fee and India-free Kashmir***.

In the area of Gilgit and Baltistan northwards from Kashmir, Islamabad rules the people directly through its own officials. A Parliament exists but local, indigenous voices have very little influence within it. This has been detailed in the ***Report on Kashmir*** recently submitted by ***Baroness Emma Nicholson*** to the European Parliament and approved overwhelmingly (2007). Many of the inhabitants in the region of Gilgit-Baltistan are *Shi'a of Ismaeli* persuasion. Efforts have been undertaken by Islamabad to introduce in the schools curriculum of Gilgit a ***purely Sunni interpretation of Islam*** and student manifestations erupted several years ago against this as well as on behalf of regional autonomy. One of the most serious illustrations of Pakistan government violation of civil and political rights is in this Gilgit region.

It is understood that Pakistan ***has not ratified*** the International Conventions on Civil and Political Rights nor on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, nor the International Convention on Torture.

### ***A Military government / impediments to the 'Rule of Law'***

The major problem facing Pakistan vis à vis human rights is the predominant role of the military and secret services in the life of the country and the failure of a permanent culture of civilian government. This situation was exacerbated by the conflict during the 'Cold War' between the 'free world' and the Soviet Union, as it found expression in Pakistan's neighbour Afghanistan. Support for the anti-Soviet '*mujaidin*' by the USA and Pakistan military led to a situation in which Pakistan moved towards ***a military-dominated***

*state* in spite of itself. It appears so today. Civilian opposition to the military ends up in prison or in exile. Because of this the legal professionals, defending people's rights, must of necessity be repressed. Today hundreds of legal professionals are in prison, or under house arrest because of this. The '*Rule of Law*' finds no support from the military government and there is hardly any *independence of judges and lawyers*. (a major concern of the United Nations). The world community, including the main fund-providers of Pakistan, must take their responsibility for this situation.

### ***Religious Minorities***

A further problem for Pakistan is the lack of tolerance for various minority religions, including the Amadiya and the Christians. Religious intolerance between various religious groups has been a recent feature within the social and cultural life of Pakistan. The government has certainly tried to grapple with this problem but in general the military and secret service rule of the country seems to exacerbate rather than calm religious tensions. Religious extremism has grown considerably in the *madrassas* and elsewhere, as the military-industrial complex ruling Pakistan has ***doled out lands and riches to military personnel***. On these newly-acquired lands the poor and the youth have been recruited in the *madrassas* where they could be forming a new batch of extremists. Unfortunately many of these youth were used by the Pakistan secret service (ISI) to penetrate Kashmir and promote its attachment to Pakistan. This has diminished somewhat recently. The Pakistani military holds responsibility for the growth of violence in Kashmir over the last 15-20 years. This of course does not diminish the responsibility of the Indian military which has equally been insensitive to the legitimate rights of Kashmiris.

### ***Conclusion***

If the Pakistan government is asking for increased international aid to 'fight terrorism' in Pakistan then it can surely be pointed out that Pakistan military / ISI contradict this stand by ***not protecting a culture of civilian rule in the country***. Thus the main challenge facing Pakistan vis à vis human rights is the creation of a civilian government elected by the people, and which promotes respect for each region of the federal republic. The international community must assist Pakistan in every possible way to achieve this.