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Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related forms of intolerance: follow-up to and implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action

Written statement* submitted by Association MIMAN, 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.

[23 August 2023]

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



Unmasking the Dark Realities: Racism, Xenophobia, Human Rights Violations, and Religious Extremism in Balochistan

In the world's quest for justice, equality, and human rights, there are instances that demand our immediate attention and collective action. The plight of the Baloch population in Pakistan stands as a stark reminder of the pressing need to address issues of racism, xenophobia, human rights violations, and religious extremism. As the stories of Baloch students facing racial profiling, women enduring threats and beatings, and religious minorities and Baloch nationalists suffering violence unfold, it becomes evident that a unified global response is essential to combat these grave injustices.

Racism, Xenophobia, and Racial Profiling: A Tarnished Reality:

The Baloch people, hailing from a distinct ethnic background, are facing an alarming pattern of racism and xenophobia within Pakistan. Baloch students, who should be able to pursue education without fear, find themselves subjected to racial profiling and discrimination. Reports of derogatory slurs, humiliation, and isolation based on their ethnic identity have shed light on the deeply rooted prejudices that hinder their educational journey and hinder their dreams of a brighter future.

Chief Justice Minallah said that the courts could not turn a blind eye to the human rights violations in Pakistan.

He ordered that a commission be formed to probe the harassment and disappearances of Baloch students. The chief justice also asked for suggestions on who could head the commission, for which lawyer Hina Jilani and politician Afrasiab Khattak's names were proposed, among others.

During the proceedings, the lawyer of the students, Imaan Mazari, apprised the court that the Baloch students had met the president twice and both times the president had assured the students to look into their issues.

Still, Mazari said that a Baloch student was picked up from Karachi recently and one from Lahore.

"Seems like the government is not taking the concerns of the students seriously," the lawyer told the court.

She suggested that the Higher Education Commission (HEC) should send notices to all universities in Pakistan instructing them to stop the harassment of Baloch students. *1

Violence Against Baloch Women: A Cry for Help:

Perhaps even more disturbing is the harrowing situation faced by Baloch women. Numerous accounts reveal that they are being subjected to threats, physical violence, and even illegal custody by Pakistani security forces. These acts of aggression strip these women of their dignity, safety, and fundamental rights. Baloch women, like all individuals, deserve the right to live free from fear and violence, and their mistreatment underscores the urgency of international intervention to protect their rights.

Religious Terrorism and Minority Persecution: A Sinister Nexus:

The situation in Balochistan takes an even graver turn with the involvement of state-backed religious organizations in religious terrorism. Religious minorities, who should be able to practice their faith without fear, are being targeted by violence and persecution. The deliberate killing of religious minorities and Baloch nationalists by these extremist groups not only creates a culture of fear and instability but also highlights a disturbing nexus between the state and extremism.

On August 16, 2023, several hundred people attacked a Christian settlement in Faisalabad district, Punjab province, after two members of the community were accused of committing “blasphemy.” The mob, armed with stones and sticks, vandalized several churches, dozens of houses, and a cemetery. While the police have arrested 130 people alleged to have been involved in the attacks, residents told local rights activists that hours before the attack, the police warned them a mob was coming but claimed they could do nothing to stop it. On August 16, after the attack, Interim Prime Minister Anwaarul Haq Kakar posted on Twitter that, “Stern action would be taken against those who violate the law and target minorities.” *2

The Baloch People's Cry for Justice:

Amidst these deeply troubling realities, the Baloch people's voices ring out for justice, dignity, and the protection of their human rights. Their pleas for freedom from racial profiling, violence against women, and extremist oppression demand the attention of the global community. These issues are not merely isolated incidents; they are a reflection of systemic problems that require collective and sustained action.

Hooran Baloch, a prominent member of the rights group Voice for Baloch Missing Persons (VBMP), held a press conference at the protest camp in Quetta where she expressed serious concern over the alleged harassment she and her family have endured, despite their commitment to a peaceful and legal struggle.

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Ms. Baloch asserted that “state entities” have consistently subjected her family to harassment in recent days, compelling their relocation from Saryab Kali Shah Nawaz to Satellite Town, Quetta. She recounted a disturbing incident on the day of their move, where they were shadowed by agents from a secret agency during the transportation of their belongings. Additionally, she described multiple instances of individuals approaching their residence’s gate and causing disturbances. *3

“But Baloch women had been targets long before. In Awaran, a city of Balochistan, security agencies had abducted Baloch women in an explosives case. Later, allegations proved untrue. Those women were so poor they had no slippers on their feet. Pakistan security forces target common Baloch citizens, even those who aren’t rights activists,” Mahrang said. *4

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One Habiba Baloch was dragged by male security officers from her home in Karachi and released after four days. *6

Pakistan must immediately address the climate of impunity around violence against religious minorities: “The authorities in Pakistan must immediately address the climate of impunity around violence against religious minorities. The vicious mob attacks are just the latest manifestation of the threat of vigilante violence which anyone can face in Pakistan after a blasphemy accusation – with religious minorities disproportionately vulnerable to the same. The existence of blasphemy laws continue to embolden groups and individuals who threaten, attack or attempt to kill the accused, or anyone connected, including members of their community.

“Pakistani authorities need no more evidence to see how dangerous the blasphemy laws are. The broad, vague and coercive nature of the blasphemy laws violate the human rights to freedom of thought, conscience and religion and freedom of expression. They have long been misused to target some of the most marginalized people in society. *7

Global Responsibility and the United Nations:

In the face of such gross violations of human rights, the international community has a responsibility to stand up and speak out. The United Nations, as a beacon of human rights and global justice, must take decisive action to address these issues:

1. **Thorough Investigation:** Urgently launch impartial investigations into reported cases of racism, xenophobia, violence against women, and religious extremism. Hold perpetrators accountable, irrespective of their affiliations.
2. **Human Rights Monitoring:** Establish mechanisms to monitor and report on human rights abuses in Balochistan. Ensure that victims have a platform to share their stories without fear of retaliation.
3. **Support for Victims:** Provide comprehensive support, including legal and psychological assistance, for victims of violence, threats, and discrimination.
4. **Promotion of Tolerance and Diversity:** Advocate for initiatives that promote tolerance, respect for diversity, and cultural understanding within Balochistan and across Pakistan.
5. **UN's Engagement:** Engage with the Pakistani government through diplomatic channels to ensure the protection of human rights, freedom of expression, and the dignity of all individuals within its borders.

Conclusion:

In the grand tapestry of global affairs, it is our moral responsibility to address the darkness that shrouds the lives of the Baloch people. By addressing the issues of racism, xenophobia, human rights violations, and religious extremism, we not only protect the rights of the Baloch population but also uphold the principles of justice, equality, and human dignity that underpin our shared humanity.

Baloch Voice Association (BVA); Baloch Peoples Congress (BPC), Voice for Baloch Missing Persons (VBMP); Baloch Voice Foundation (BVF), NGO(s) without consultative status, also share the views expressed in this statement.

*1 <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2356419/place-baloch-students-complaints-before-commission-ihc>

*2 <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/08/22/pakistan-mob-attacks-christian-settlement>

*3 <https://thebalochistanpost.net/2023/08/baloch-activist-alleges-harassment-amid-struggle-against-forced-disappearances/>

*4 IBID *5 IBID *6 <https://thewire.in/south-asia/the-assault-by-pakistan-on-baloch-peoples-rights-has-now-reached-women>

*7 <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/08/pakistan-authorities-must-ensure-protection-of-minority-christian-community/>