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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement submitted by Alulbayt Foundation, 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.

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



Situation of Shia Communities in Parachinar, Pakistan

The Alulbayt Foundation is deeply concerned about the humanitarian crisis affecting Shia communities in Parachinar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Once known for religious diversity, this region has endured two decades of intensified sectarian violence, disproportionately harming Shia residents. Though Pakistan's Constitution affirms freedom of religion and the right to life (Constitution of Pakistan, 1973), and the country is bound by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948), these commitments often remain unrealised in Parachinar. This statement summarises the ongoing violence, highlights socio-economic and humanitarian repercussions, and examines barriers to justice and essential services. We urgently call on Pakistani authorities and the international community to protect Parachinar's Shias and address decades of violence, neglect, and social fragmentation, ensuring lasting stability.

Background and Historical Context

Parachinar serves as the administrative centre of Kurram District, near the mountainous frontier between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Due to its cross-border location, the region has historically been exposed to militant factions and insurgent groups. Although Pakistan's tribal areas were subjected to multiple military operations during the "war on terror," militant activity persisted, especially in areas where sectarian fault lines could be exploited (International Crisis Group, 2018).

Local tribal structures once played a role in mitigating internal disputes, but heavily armed militant groups—often influenced by extremist ideologies—have undercut these traditional mechanisms. The result has been a cycle of violence undermining socio-economic development and damaging public trust in state institutions. Despite the 2018 merger of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, which was intended to extend constitutional protections, many residents in Parachinar continue to experience insecurity and marginalisation.

Patterns of Sectarian Violence

Targeted Attacks

Parachinar has witnessed repeated waves of violence targeting Shia civilians. Common methods include suicide bombings, roadside explosions, targeted shootings, and improvised explosive devices in busy marketplaces. Notable examples include:

- January 2017 Market Bombing: A bomb in a crowded vegetable market killed at least 20 people and injured many more (BBC News, 2017a).
- June 2017 Twin Blasts: Two explosions in another busy marketplace claimed over 25 lives and left numerous residents seriously injured (BBC News, 2017b).
- November 2024 Attack: Gunmen targeted vehicles transporting Shia Muslims in north-west Pakistan, causing at least 42 fatalities and injuring 20 more (The Guardian, 2024).

These assaults underline the fragility of security in Parachinar. Although various extremist groups have claimed responsibility, local residents often criticise the government for failing to dismantle militant networks effectively.

Community Fear and Trauma

Beyond immediate casualties, these attacks generate profound fear among Shia communities. Survivors describe ongoing anxiety and reluctance to participate in religious or public gatherings, fearing further violence. Places once central to community life are now viewed with suspicion, limiting economic activities and accelerating social fragmentation.

This prolonged distress erodes confidence in local authorities and drives many families to relocate elsewhere (ReliefWeb, 2017).

Impact on Fundamental Rights and Freedoms

Constraints on Freedom of Religion

Article 20 of the Pakistani Constitution affirms citizens' rights to profess and practise their religion (Constitution of Pakistan, 1973). In Parachinar, however, imambargahs (Shia congregation halls) and religious commemorations, particularly during Muharram, have been repeatedly attacked. Shia residents must rely on tighter security or smaller gatherings to minimise exposure, an approach that impedes the free exercise of their faith.

Restrictions on Movement

Military checkpoints, curfews, and sudden road closures frequently disrupt daily life. These measures, introduced to tackle security threats, also hamper the flow of essential goods and impede travel for medical care or economic ventures. The Parachinar-Peshawar highway, a critical conduit for commerce and humanitarian aid, has often been shut during volatile periods, leaving residents isolated and aggravating already precarious living conditions (Turi, 2025).

Healthcare Challenges

The primary hospital in Parachinar struggles with insufficient staff, supplies, and equipment. During emergencies triggered by bombings or militant attacks, overwhelming patient numbers collide with limited healthcare capacity. Curfews and blockades further restrain ambulance movement, while patients with chronic illnesses are forced to forgo necessary treatments in major cities when roads are closed (Turi, 2025). This situation endangers lives and exacerbates inequalities in healthcare access.

Humanitarian Relief Efforts and Ongoing Crisis

Authorities pinned hopes on a 4 January convoy delivering crucial aid to Parachinar, but Deputy Commissioner Javedullah Mehsud's team was ambushed near Bagan, severely injuring him. This incident, after 130 recent deaths, underscored the ceasefire's fragility and dire relief challenges.

The crisis is a full-blown humanitarian emergency. Former federal minister Sajid Hussain Turi reports at least 128 children have died in 85 days due to resource shortages (Guramani, 2024). Road blockades, including on the Parachinar-Peshawar highway, impede deliveries of food, fuel, and vital medicines. Even a federal airlift of supplies cannot cover the population's needs. Hospitals remain critically under-resourced, leaving mothers in labour and heart patients at grave risk. Public protests, notably by Majlis Wahdat-i-Muslimeen (MWM) in Karachi, have demanded immediate relief for those trapped in Parachinar's ongoing conflict. Local activists warn of consequences if urgent assistance is not provided.

The Role of State Institutions and Legal Framework

Constitutional Obligations

Pakistan's Constitution and its ratification of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948) commit the state to safeguarding the rights of all religious communities. However, the difficulties facing Shia residents in Parachinar—including targeted killings, restrictions on movement, and insufficient basic services—highlight inadequacies in current governance structures and administrative policies.

State Neglect and Complicity

The official response to violence in Parachinar has been marred by allegations of neglect and, at times, complicity. Despite successive military offensives, extremist factions continue to operate, and perpetrators of sectarian violence often remain at large. Accusations of collusion between local actors and militant groups further undermine faith in the government's willingness and capacity to protect the Shia population.

This situation reflects a wider pattern of sectarian persecution across Pakistan, where organisations like Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan reportedly function with relative impunity, orchestrating attacks against Shia communities nationwide. The Pakistani state's reluctance or inability to dismantle such networks erodes public trust, damages societal cohesion, and entrenches cycles of retaliatory violence.

Recommendations

In light of the grave human rights situation in Parachinar, the Alulbayt Foundation urges the United Nations Human Rights Council to:

1. **Call on the Pakistani Government to Ensure Accountability** The UNHRC should pressure the Pakistani government to conduct impartial investigations into all incidents of sectarian violence in Parachinar and hold perpetrators accountable. This includes prosecuting members of extremist groups and addressing allegations of collusion between state actors and militant organisations.
2. **Provide International Protection and Support** The UNHRC should work with international organisations, such as the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), to provide protection and support to the Shia community in Parachinar. This could include deploying human rights monitors to the region and facilitating humanitarian aid to address the ongoing crisis.
3. **Promote Interfaith Dialogue and Reconciliation** The UNHRC should encourage the Pakistani government to promote interfaith dialogue and reconciliation initiatives to address the root causes of sectarian violence. This includes fostering understanding and cooperation between Shia and Sunni communities and countering extremist ideologies.
4. **Monitor and Report on the Human Rights Situation** The UNHRC should establish a mechanism to monitor and report on the human rights situation in Parachinar and other regions affected by sectarian violence. Regular reporting will help ensure that the international community remains informed and engaged in addressing the issue.

Conclusion

The Shia communities of Parachinar have borne the brunt of widespread sectarian violence and neglect, resulting in devastating humanitarian outcomes and severe restrictions on their fundamental rights. Acts of terror—from bombings to armed assaults—have undermined not only the sense of security but also the socio-economic stability of this historically diverse region. While Pakistan’s Constitution and international obligations provide robust protections on paper, the practical realities in Parachinar reveal systemic gaps that must be urgently addressed.

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