



Human Rights in Balochistan

**Before the
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations**

**Committee on Foreign Affairs
United States House of Representatives**

Testimony by

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Thank you Mr. Chairman and members of this committee, Amnesty International is pleased to testify in this hearing. The human rights situation in the Pakistani province of Balochistan is extremely disturbing. This is one of the most militarized regions of Pakistan.

Summary:

According to our own research, at least 249 Baloch activists, teachers, journalists and lawyers have disappeared or been murdered between 24 October 2010 and 10 September 2011 alone, many in so-called 'kill and dump' operations. At least 7 Baloch journalists who openly promoted nationalist causes were killed in the provinces in 2011. Enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention, torture, and extra-judicial and other unlawful killings carried out with total impunity by state forces in Balochistan.

Armed Baloch groups have been implicated in the targeted killings of state security forces, non-Baloch civilians and government employees, including teachers at government education institutions and Urdu and Panjabi speaking civilians whose only crime appears to be their ethnic or linguistic background.

Sectarian attacks increased in Balochistan including deliberate targeting of minority Shi'a Muslims by militant groups including Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and others.

Background:

Amnesty International is deeply concerned about the chronic insecurity faced by people in the province of Balochistan. The Pakistani government is primarily to blame for this situation due to its inability or unwillingness to protect civilians from human rights abuses or bring perpetrators to justice.

Years of human rights violations by Pakistani security forces and the continued failure of the Pakistani government to adequately address economic and social demands in the country's poorest region has entrenched a sense of hopelessness and resentment in the Baloch community.

All communities in Balochistan face poor access to health facilities, education, energy and infrastructure and opportunities for employment. But the Balochi and Brahui-speaking regions of the province have been and remain the most neglected and least developed by the state, despite these areas being rich in mineral resources and fossil fuels.

Balochistan is one of the most militarized regions of Pakistan, with the military, paramilitary Frontier Corp and levies, and police stationed across this vast province. Despite this presence, or perhaps because of it, Balochistan is one of the most dangerous parts of Pakistan, with armed

groups affiliated with the state, sectarian armed groups, armed groups hostile to the state, and criminal gangs operating with near complete impunity.

Most victims of human rights abuses – whether the perpetrator is affiliated with the state, armed Baloch or sectarian groups – are too terrified to speak openly for fear of being killed. With the upsurge in violence and collapse of the rule of law, the province is gradually heading to a state of perpetual conflict that threatens stability not only in Pakistan but also in the neighboring countries of Afghanistan and Iran, and throughout the region.

Human rights violations attributed to security forces

According to our own research, at least 249 Baloch activists, teachers, journalists and lawyers have disappeared or been murdered between 24 October 2010 and 10 September 2011 alone, many in so-called 'kill and dump' operations.

The bullet-ridden bodies of missing persons, most allegedly bearing torture marks, have been recovered across the province almost every day. Victims' families and the Baloch population at large blame these 'kill and dump' incidents on Pakistani security forces, especially the Frontier Corps and intelligence services.

Many of the victims were reportedly abducted by uniformed Frontier Corps soldiers, often accompanying men in plain clothes, in front of multiple witnesses at military checkpoints and in cities and towns.

Security forces deny the charges and claim that the deaths are a result of rivalry between Baloch militant groups, but the systematic and widespread nature of these killings, and the fact that several of the victims were witnessed being detained by state forces weeks or months before later being found dead, suggests otherwise. State security forces have also been

accused of supporting pro-state Baloch armed groups accused of killing Baloch nationalists. At least 7 Baloch journalists who openly promoted nationalist causes were killed in the provinces in 2011.

The Pakistan government must immediately put an end to the practice of enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention, torture, and extra-judicial and other unlawful killings carried out with total impunity by state forces in Balochistan. Credible investigations into these incidents – resulting in prosecutions – are absolutely necessary to establish even a basic level of stability in the province and develop trust between the Baloch people and the Pakistan government.

Armed groups:

Armed Baloch groups have been implicated in the targeted killings of state security forces, non-Baloch civilians and government employees, including teachers at government education institutions, and Urdu and Punjabi-speaking civilians whose only crime appears to be their ethnic or linguistic background.

On 14 August 2010, Pakistan's Independence Day, 17 people of Punjabi origin were killed in Quetta. The Balochistan Liberation Army claimed responsibility, saying that the killings were in response to the killings of Baloch missing persons. Hundreds of teachers and other professionals have fled the province as a result of these killings, bringing the education system to a breaking point and damaging the local economy.

Baloch armed groups have also claimed responsibility for killing fellow Baloch accused of spying for the state, and have been implicated in the killing of members of rival political factions, including activists considered too moderate merely because they do not advocate complete separation from Pakistan.

Nationalist groups have also claimed responsibility for repeated attacks on gas and electricity infrastructure, causing severe energy shortages in the province. Balochistan is a very cold place in winter, and with gas, oil and electricity in short supply and prices very high, these attacks have been particularly debilitating for ordinary people living in the province.

Balochistan has also witnessed an influx of Taliban and other armed Islamist groups in the northern areas that are mainly populated by ethnic Pashtuns. Prominent Afghan Taliban leaders are widely believed to be based in Quetta. With the army clamping down on militancy in northwest Pakistan, Taliban insurgents are increasingly using areas of Balochistan to regroup and rearm, creating further instability.

Sectarian killings:

Sectarian attacks have occurred across Pakistan for some years now but have increased in Balochistan since at least 2010. These are not random killings but demonstrate the deliberate targeting of minority Shi'a Muslims by militant groups including Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and others. Balochistan's Hazara Shi'a community claims that hundreds of their members have been murdered by Taliban and Sunni extremists since 2004.

Routine targeted killings against the Hazara and other groups because of their ethnicity, religion or political affiliation raises serious questions about the ability or willingness of Pakistan security forces to protect the people of Balochistan. Continued failure to address sectarian violence will only exacerbate the general breakdown in law and order in Balochistan.

Pakistani government response:

Despite several pledges to improve the law and order situation and put an end to human rights abuses in Balochistan, Pakistan's government has

failed to provide a clear framework for how it will achieve this and the situation continues to deteriorate.

In an attempt to address the Baloch community's deep-rooted sense of disenfranchisement, the Pakistan government in November 2009 launched the Aghaz-e-Huqooq-e-Balochistan, a peace and reconciliation package aimed at diffusing tensions in the province and bringing the Baloch into the mainstream of Pakistani society.

The reform package contains some 61 measures aimed at increasing provincial autonomy by addressing constitutional, economic, political and administrative grievances. Although the government claims to have implemented around 80% of the envisaged measures, there has been no major improvement in the human rights situation.

Baloch nationalist groups have dismissed the reform package as a half-hearted federal attempt to divert attention from their demands for full political autonomy.

The government has yet to publicly reveal the findings of its investigations into the hundreds of people believed to be held secretly by security forces and intelligence services as part of the so-called "war on terror," or in response to internal opposition in Balochistan.

In March 2010, the Pakistan government established the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances to trace the disappeared. Of the several hundred cases that have come before both commissions across Pakistan, only 224 people have been traced, including some from Balochistan.

As I have already outlined, these abuses continue unabated. Amnesty International has observed the Commission during its hearings and has noted several deficiencies, including the lack of a protection program for

those who have witnessed abuses and for relatives of victims, shortages in staffing capacity to investigate the high volume of cases, and failure to adequately investigate the security forces and intelligence services, which are frequently accused of involvement in disappearances.

No member of state security forces or intelligence services has been prosecuted for alleged involvement in the enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention, torture or killing of victims.

Amnesty International calls on all parties to any armed conflict in Balochistan to:

- Comply with Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions and Additional Protocol II governing non-international armed conflicts.

Amnesty International calls on the Pakistani government to:

- Accede to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance;
- Investigate all alleged human rights abuses in the province;
- Bring all perpetrators of abuses to justice, whether state or non-state actors, in trials meeting international standards of due process;
- Ensure that all individuals brought to justice receive a fair trial and are not subjected to torture or other abuses in detention; and
- Ensure any military operations comply with International Humanitarian Law applicable to non-international armed conflict.

Amnesty International calls on all non-state armed groups in Balochistan to:

- Refrain from committing human rights abuses and respect the laws of Pakistan that are consistent with international human rights standards and criminalize a range of human rights abuses, including torture, abduction

and unlawful killing; strictly abide by the provisions of international humanitarian law and ensure that civilians are not exposed to violence.

Amnesty International calls on the United States government to:

- Raise human rights abuses in Balochistan during all the interactions with the Government of Pakistan.
- Apply the Leahy Amendment without waivers to all Pakistani military units in Balochistan.

As one of Pakistan's most significant international allies, Amnesty International calls on the United States to apply the Leahy Amendment to ensure that military assistance to units of the Army, Air force, Navy, Frontier Corp, Levies, and other security forces supported by Pakistan in Balochistan is not linked to human rights abuses.

Thank you for inviting Amnesty International to testify in this hearing.

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United States House of Representatives
Committee on Foreign Affairs

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