

Pakistan: UN review highlights human rights failures

17 November 2017

Pakistan's third Universal Periodic Review (UPR) has drawn global attention to a number of serious human rights failures in the country, said the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) today.

On 16 November, the UPR Working Group of the Human Rights Council adopted a draft UPR outcome report for Pakistan. Pakistan received a total of 289 recommendations – a substantial increase from its previous UPR in 2012, when Pakistan received 167 recommendations. As many as 111 State delegations took the floor to make statements, and 14 States submitted their questions in advance.

"That well over a hundred delegations participated in the review indicates the global community's interest in Pakistan's human rights situation," said Frederick Rawski, ICJ's Asia Director.

Key recommendations urge Pakistan to:

- Reinstatement of a moratorium on executions with the view to abolishing the death penalty;
- Repeal or amend "blasphemy laws" to bring them in line with international human rights law;
- Ratify the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance and a number of other human rights treaties;
- Ensure effective protection of the rights of religious minorities, human rights defenders, journalists and other vulnerable groups;
- Strengthen the National Commission for Human Rights;
- Ensure prompt, impartial and effective investigations of human rights violations and bring perpetrators to justice;
- Set 18 as the minimum legal age for marriage; and
- Ensure effective implementation of laws on violence against women.

"The States' recommendations echo the concerns of dozens of civil society organizations and even the National Commission of Human Rights – who all agree that the Government must take urgent measures to address the downward spiral of rights in the country", Rawski said.

Pakistan will now examine the recommendations and respond to the Human Rights Council at latest by the Council's next session in March 2018.

Pakistan's review comes at a time of serious concern about the rights situation in



the country.

The Government lifted the informal moratorium on the death penalty and carried out nearly 500 executions in less than three years – among the highest execution rates in the world; Parliament enacted laws allowing military courts to try civilians for certain terrorism-related offences in secret trials; and the authorities started a new wave of crackdowns on NGOs, journalists and human rights defenders, including subjecting them to enforced disappearance.

Persecution of religious minority communities also continues despite the Government's claims that religious minorities "enjoy equal rights as equal citizens of Pakistan". Last month, three Ahmadi men were sentenced to death for blasphemy for allegedly scratching anti-Ahmadi pamphlets that had the "Mohr-e-Nabuwat" (seal of the Prophet Muhammad) printed on them. And earlier this week, the Islamabad High Court directed the Government to respond to a petition demanding a separate database for Ahmadis in the civil service to ensure they are not "posted in offices involving sensitive matters".

"As a member of the Human Rights Council, Pakistan is expected to uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights, something it has clearly failed to do," added Rawski.

"Pakistan should make use of this process by accepting the recommendations made during the review and adopting a concrete, action-based national human rights plan to ensure their effective implementation."

Contact

Frederick Rawski, ICJ Asia Pacific Regional Director, t: +66 64 478 1121, e: frederick.rawski@icj.org

Reema Omer, ICJ International Legal Adviser for Pakistan (London), t: +447889565691; e: [reema.omer\(a\)icj.org](mailto:reema.omer(a)icj.org)

Additional information

UN Member States reviewed Pakistan's human rights record for the third time on Monday, 13 November, through the UPR process.

The UPR is a unique mechanism of the UN Human Rights Council aimed at improving the human rights situation of each of the 193 UN Member States. Under this mechanism, the human rights record of all UN Member States is peer-reviewed every four to five years by the UPR Working Group, consisting of the 47 UN Member States of the Human Rights Council; however, any UN Member State can take part in the discussions and the dialogue during the UPR of the reviewed States. States then make recommendations to the country under review, which has the option of accepting or noting the recommendations.