



27 May 2025

Pakistan must end crackdown on Baloch human rights defenders

Respected Prime Minister, Shehbaz Sharif,

We, the undersigned five human rights organizations, strongly condemn the harassment and arbitrary detention of Baloch human rights defenders (HRDs) exercising their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly in Pakistan, particularly in Balochistan province. The actions of your government to systematically harass and detain HRDs, raising their voice against enforced disappearances and other unlawful state practices, run afoul of Pakistan's international human rights obligations.

Pakistan authorities must end the systematic targeting and harassment of the Baloch Yakjehti Committee (BYC), a peaceful grassroots movement that has mobilized thousands to demand justice, accountability, and an end to enforced disappearances. The attacks on BYC leaders and supporters, who are peacefully exercising their rights to freedom of expression and assembly, not only violate Pakistan's constitution but also its international legal obligations.

The authorities have consistently weaponized the public order and anti-terror laws to criminalize Baloch civic resistance and unlawfully detain BYC leaders and members. Laws like the Maintenance of Public Order Ordinance, 1960 (MPO), Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, 2016 and Anti-Terrorism Act, 1997 and tactics such as travel bans have been repeatedly instrumentalized to silence peaceful dissent, marking a dangerous erosion of the rule of law.

Pakistan authorities have carried out a series of enforced disappearances and arbitrary detentions since 20 March against HRDs and many remain in detention for over two months. The reprisals are in the aftermath of a militant attack on the Jaffar Express passenger train in Balochistan on 11 March. HRD and BYC central committee member Bebag Zehri and another HRD were arrested on 20 March. Bebag Zehri, a person with disability, remains detained to date under the MPO—a law which has been used against most of the detained Baloch activists and restricts access to bail. On 21 March, Balochistan police opened fire on peaceful protesters who were calling for his release. Three people were killed and at least seven injured due to police violence against protesters. In the early hours of 22 March, woman human rights defenders (WHRDs), Mahrang Baloch and Beebow Baloch, were arrested from a peaceful sit-in in Quetta against police violence and calling for Bebag's release. The women are detained at the Hudda Jail, Quetta under the MPO. For several hours following their arrest, there was no information about their whereabouts, and the WHRDs were denied access to legal counsel of family members causing concern for their safety, a pattern which is repeated in many of the arrests of Baloch HRDs and family members. Family members have also repeatedly raised concerns regarding detention conditions and lack of access to adequate medical facilities.

On 24 March, BYC leader Sammi Deen Baloch and several other HRDs were arrested during a peaceful demonstration in Karachi against the targeting of BYC members and HRDs. Despite being

granted bail by a judicial magistrate in Karachi the following day (25 March), Sammi Deen Baloch was re-arrested under the MPO, a deliberate strategy to prevent release and prolong detention by several means. These harassment tactics reflect the intention of Pakistan authorities to intimidate and dismantle the BYC and the work of Baloch HRDs. On 1 April, Sammi Deen Baloch was released following a decision by the Sindh government to remove her name from the MPO detention order. On 18 April, the home of Israr Baloch – a lawyer in Quetta representing BYC HRDs – was raided and law enforcement officers threatened his family with consequences if Israr did not stop his human rights work. The authorities also moved WHRD Beebow Baloch from Hudda Jail to Pishin Prison on 23 April where her medical condition severely deteriorated. After being transferred to a hospital on 2 May she was sent back to Hudda Jail, despite her condition not having improved. Her family has reported that she was subject to physical torture while being moved.

The Balochistan authorities continued the crackdown on the BYC leadership and members by arresting human rights defenders Shah Jee Sibghat Ullah on 30 March and Gulzadi Baloch on 7 April, and by detaining family members of other BYC leaders as part of a pattern of intimidation of activists to psychologically and socially pressure HRDs into silence. WHRD Sabiha Baloch, whose father was detained on 5 April and his whereabouts remain unknown, faces threat of imminent arrest on baseless charges. Participants of a peaceful protest organized by BYC on 25 April in Karachi were subject to arbitrary detention on charges of unlawful assembly, public nuisance, and sedition. Similarly on 20 May, 20 protesters in Quetta were detained by security forces and 5 remain under arrest after they gathered for a peaceful protest.

This severe crackdown on Baloch activists violates Pakistan's international human rights obligations and its own Constitutional safeguards. The Pakistani Constitution guarantees the right to assemble peacefully under Article 16 and the right to freedom of speech and expression under Article 19. Article 10 provides the right to life and liberty and Article 10A the right to fair trial and due process. Pakistan has ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and in its treaty body review last year the Human Rights Committee expressed concerns about the frequent use of the Exit Control Lists, particularly in late 2024, and the Anti-Terrorism Act to arbitrarily restrict the freedom of movement of dissenting persons, including WHRDs such as Sammi Deen Baloch and Mahrang Baloch. The BYC and Baloch HRDs follow a non-violent, rights-based approach, and the crackdown on their work including false criminalization erodes space for meaningful engagement with human rights and the rights of the Baloch community.

These developments come against a backdrop of harassment of journalists and a clampdown on freedom of expression. In March, journalist Waheed Murad was arrested simply for reporting on a statement by a Baloch politician. Last month, a case was filed under the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act against advocate Jalila Haider for expressing online support for Mahrang Baloch. On 24 May, Baloch journalist Abdul Latif Baloch, who reported on enforced disappearances, was shot dead at his family home during an alleged attempted abduction. His son previously disappeared and found dead a few months ago. Frequent internet shutdowns in Balochistan further compromise the free flow of information and has worsened the security situation for HRDs, their families and at-risk communities. Digital censorship, internet shutdowns, surveillance and other forms of restriction on freedom of expression are yet another core tactic of silencing dissent and further isolating and endangering Baloch voices.

It is imperative that human rights are upheld and never sacrificed in the name of security. We call on the Pakistani authorities to:

- Immediately and unconditionally release all Baloch HRDs and their family members arbitrarily detained solely for peacefully exercising their rights in line with the right to liberty and safety.

- Drop all charges against HRDs based solely on the exercise of their rights.
- Pending their release, ensure the safety of HRDs and family members, including by sharing accurate information about their whereabouts, providing effective access to family members, legal counsel and medical treatment.
- Conduct a thorough, impartial, effective and transparent investigation into the allegations of torture and mistreatment by Pakistani authorities of Baloch HRDs under detention.
- End the crackdown against HRDs, journalists, protesters and dissidents by ensuring their right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly are fully protected.
- Cease all forms of reprisals against family members of HRDs.
- Conduct an effective, prompt, thorough and impartial investigation into the unlawful use of force against protesters on 21 March in Quetta and bring those suspected of responsibility to justice through fair trials.

Signed by:

Amnesty International

Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)

Front Line Defenders (FLD)

International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), in the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders

World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT), in the framework of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders