

PAKISTAN

UN Human Rights Council must respond to bombing of Balochistan

A Statement by the Asian Human Rights Commission

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On 27 August 2006 it was reported that fighter jets and helicopters attacked the south western province of Balochistan, killing some 37 government opponents, including a former governor and chief minister of the province, Sardar Akbar Khan Bugti. The military action is also reported to have claimed the lives of two members of the provincial assembly and two of Bugti's grandsons. Afterwards, the president-cum-army commander congratulated the troops for their overwhelming use of force in killing the 79-year-old invalid and his handful of supporters.

Since 2001, the military has engaged in brutal and uncompromising attacks on its opponents in Balochistan. It has used the air force on at least six occasions. Some 600 persons are estimated to have been disappeared. Out of at least 4000 persons detained in the province before 5 December 2005, when the federal interior minister spoke of them before the National Assembly, not even 200 hundred are known to have been produced in the courts. The actual numbers of those detained and disappeared may be far higher.

While the conflict in Balochistan is ostensibly about separatism and tribal politics, in fact the government's determination to attack and kill ruthlessly is fuelled by its desire for control of the resource-rich areas of the province, and its unwillingness to share the profits obtained with the local population. A parliamentary committee of the National Assembly in 2003 advised the country's military government that it should solve the conflict in Balochistan through dialogue and recognition of the legitimate demands of local people that they be paid royalties for the extracting of mineral wealth. The army instead provoked militancy through its use of force and denial of the right of victims to take complaints against military personnel to the courts.

This latest slaughter is only likely to provoke far greater divisiveness in a country that is already rife with conflict. Apart from ensuring continued widespread popular support for Bugti, which resulted in riots in major cities, the government has further distanced itself from the country's provincial assemblies, three of which have openly opposed the military operation in Balochistan.

Somehow, despite all of this Pakistan has been able to secure membership on the new UN Human Rights Council. As this latest incident illustrates, being a member of such a body has done nothing to sway the military from policies that aim to obtain bloodshed rather than peace.

The Asian Human Rights Commission therefore calls for the Human Rights Council to take up the latest attacks as a matter of priority in its forthcoming session in September, and review the membership of Pakistan in light of the government's failure to follow even the recommendations of its own parliament, to say nothing of international law on human rights. These attacks and their

consequences demand special attention from the international community, without which the Pakistani armed forces, under the national leadership, will continue to kill with impunity, the consequences of which will be felt not only by the people of Pakistan but the entire region and beyond.

About AHRC: The Asian Human Rights Commission is a regional non-governmental organisation monitoring and lobbying human rights issues in Asia. The Hong Kong-based group was founded in 1984.