

ANALYSIS

“Grim Markers”: Why are People ‘Disappearing’ in Pakistan?

Sunday 22 April 2018, by [KUMAR V. Arun](#) (Date first published: 20 April 2018).

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Raza Khan, a young social activist, vanished like many others without any trace [1]. Many suspect the hands of Pakistan’s powerful intelligence services.

According to reports, Raza was last seen attending a debate meeting at Low-key Lokai, a progressive discussion space which he used to manage. The open meeting was called to discuss the recent Labaik sit-in and the rising religious extremist violence in Pakistan.

Recently, an independent human rights group has expressed serious concern over rising cases of enforced disappearances, blasphemy-related violence and extrajudicial killings in the past year in Pakistan.

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), a non-governmental organisation, launching its annual report on Monday, highlighted the “grim markers” of the state of human rights in the country in 2017.

“An overarching concern is that even where the protection of legislation exists, the prosecution and conviction of perpetrators has remained at a very low level,” the report said [2].

Mehdi Hasan, HRCP chairperson, blamed Pakistan’s “weak government” for not having an “effective hold on the society”.

He said that “most” human rights violations that occur in Pakistan “are committed by the government institutions.”

There are 1,498 cases of enforced disappearances cases pending with the inquiry commission as of November 2017. Many of the ‘missing persons’ are allegedly picked up by the country’s notorious intelligence services and tortured. Recently, the United Front, alliance of various left and progressive parties in Pakistan in a meeting called upon the state to recover all the missing persons, and noted that enforced disappearance cases are a blot to democracy.

In a UN General Assembly resolution 47/133 adopted on December 18, 1992, noted that “enforced disappearance undermines the deepest values of any society committed to respect for the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms, and that the systematic practice of such acts is of the nature of a crime against humanity [3].”

In October last year, Supreme Court Justice Ejaz Afzal Khan, demanding a detailed report on

enforced disappearance cases said , “the highest judicial office of the country has no answer to give to the loved ones of the missing persons who have been doing the rounds of the courts.”

Pakistan in its Universal Periodic Review at UN claimed that the commission on enforced disappearances examined 2,416 disappearances that happened between March 2011 to November 2016. Even though the commission was able to trace 1,798 of the people to either being at home or detained on criminal or terrorism charges, the government failed to hold anyone responsible for disappearances accountable [4].

Amnesty International notes that scarcely does a week go by without the organization receiving reports of people going missing in Pakistan. “Many of them may have been subjected to enforced disappearances, which is a crime under international law”, said Dinushika Dissanayake, Deputy South Asia Director [5].

In the seminar, organised in January this year by HRCP and Institute of Peace and Secular Studies (IPSS) in Lahore committed to fight for the families of missing persons, the participants demanded that the Government of Pakistan make public the three member commission of judges’ report of 2010 & implement its recommendations. Also, they demanded to criminalize enforced disappearances and empower the Commission of Inquiry and turn it into a judicial commission.

The seminar called upon the country’s leadership to immediately ratify the international convention on enforced disappearances.

V. Arun Kumar/ Newsclick/

P.S.

* The Dawn News/ April 20, 2018:

<http://www.thedawn-news.org/2018/04/20/why-are-people-disappearing-in-pakistan/>

Footnotes

[1] ESSF (article 44147), [Pakistan - Raza Mehmood Khan: Activist ‘Missing’ After Anti-Extremism Meeting.](#)

[2] ESSF (article 44148), [HRCP, Pakistan watchdog, slams ‘grim’ state of human rights.](#)

[3] <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/EnforcedDisappearance.aspx>

[4] <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/11/16/pakistani-senator-works-end-enforced-disappearances>

[5] <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/12/pakistan-peace-activist-missing/>