

Pakistan's Democratic Transition Is Being Reversed, Say Civil Society Members

Monday 15 July 2019, by [Collective / Multiple signers](#) (Date first published: 15 July 2019).

“There is no alternative to a constitutional, civilian, democratic and peoples’ rule.”

New Delhi: More than 100 members of the Pakistani civil society – intellectuals, writers, journalists, lawyers, activists and trade union members – have released a statement expressing concern at the direction the country is going in. Pakistan, they said, is “faced with a colossal crises” due to “repeated undemocratic interventions and a lack of consistent sustainable policies”.

Democratic institutions and rights including the freedom of expression, they argue, must be strengthened, as currently “autocratic forces” are dictating the power structure. The country’s focus, they say, must move from ‘national security’ to a more holistic ‘human security’.

Their statement lays out both the reasons for concern and the values and principles they think the country must uphold. The full text of the statement and list of signatories is reproduced below.

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We the concerned citizens, intellectuals, writers, journalists, lawyers, civil society activists and democrats from across various shades of opinion, who have been dedicated to the cause of a peoples’ democratic, federal, prosperous and pluralist Pakistan at peace with itself and with the world, are alarmed about any prospect of implosion of the state and society.

We are of the considered view that:

- a. Pakistan is now faced with colossal crises and a dependent and fragile economic base can no more take the burden of a national security state. The crises have become unmanageable due to repeated undemocratic interventions and a lack of consistent sustainable policies. The IMF recipes, without bringing changes in the power-structure towards a people-centric development paradigm, cannot salvage the crisis of a dependent and uncompetitive economy, despite an unprecedented doze of foreign loans in recent years which will further worsen a vicious debt-trap.
- b. Despite some flaws and shortcomings of the past democratic governments, the decade old ‘democratic transition’ is being gradually reversed through an illegitimate creeping coup in favour of a de facto authoritarian power-structure which is being overwhelmingly dictated by autocratic forces behind the façade of a sham populist regime with fascist inclinations.
- c. The constitutional rule, parliamentary system, federal structures, freedom of expression, dissent and media freedom in particular, authenticity of judicial independence, due process of justice, sanctity of institutional neutrality, judicial restraint and legitimate constraints on security apparatuses not to meddle in matters other than national security and, above all, the civil/social/human and economic rights of the people are being undermined.

d. All kinds of media have been gagged and being overtly censored by the powers that be, social media activists are being kidnapped or ostracised, freedom of speech is being suppressed under the inverse pretext of so-called hybrid warfare; peoples' peaceful rights' and internally displaced peoples movements, such as PTM and others, movement for missing persons, media rights bodies, lawyers bodies, independent journalists and trade unions, etc., are being maligned and suppressed; rights of women and minorities' in particular are being trampled upon; Baluch people are continuing to suffer at the hands of continuing conflict and no political solution is in sight through dialogue as envisaged by NAP; if certain parties are becoming a target of terrorism, such as ANP, political adversaries and critics are being subjected to a political witch-hunt in a selected and orchestrated 'accountability'; elected opposition leaders are being implicated in false cases and denied their right to represent their constituents.

An end to the conflict in Baluchistan is not in sight causing great sufferings to the Baluch people due to non-implementation of National Action Plan in this regard for finding a political solution to the alienation of Baluch people.

The people of former FATA have immensely suffered in terms of life and property in the last four decades and their genuine complaints are yet not fully address. The democratic integration of FATA into KP remains problematic causing unrest among the youth and the IDPs.

e. The federalist structures and the due rights of the federating units are being marginalised in contravention of the 18th Amendment; the provinces are being run either through remote control, as Punjab and KP, or being subjugated through arbitrary and discriminatory ways, such as Baluchistan and erstwhile FATA, and deprived, as in the case of Sindh.

f. Isolationist foreign and security policies continue to keep the country in a tight corner in international fora, including FATF, and have kept the country in a perpetual conflict with all its neighbours.

g. Despite a national consensus reached on a National Action Plan and military operations, the existential threat of terrorism and extremism to society demands all state institutions to address the basic causes behind the rise of scourge of terrorism and extremism.

Therefore, we call upon the peoples of Pakistan and all democratic and progressive forces to stand for:

1. The sovereignty of the people and their civil, social, economic and human rights, including freedom of expression, as enshrined in the international covenants and the Constitution and unfettered right to elect their true representatives through a free, fair and un-manipulated franchise must be actualised under a fully independent and powerful Election Commission, as opposed to the past farcical and controversial electoral exercises.

2. There is no alternative to a constitutional, civilian, democratic and peoples' rule as reflected through a sovereign parliament, autonomous provincial assemblies and the authoritative local governments, participatory federation and provincial autonomy, subordination of all institutions of the state to the will of the people (Parliament), a responsible and truly representative government serving the interests of the downtrodden people of Pakistan.

3. The trichotomy of power and separation of legislative, judicial and executive arms of the state have to be observed with a sovereign parliament without any encroachment by any institution in the domain of other institutions. All unconstitutional incursions by the state institutions, such as by the security institutions into the matters other than security and unrestrained judicial 'activism' that

undermines legitimate governance, must be stopped forthwith.

4. The civil, human and economic rights and freedoms of the citizens, as enshrined in the international covenants and the 1973 Constitution, must be respected and protected by all organs of the state without any discrimination on any basis. Suppression of freedom of expression, due process of law, impunity of state institutions in the cases of missing persons, ban on students' unions, restrictions on trade unions and professional associations, blatant censorship of media, all kinds of discriminations against women and minorities and use of violence by the state and non-state actors against peaceful citizens must come to an end.

A political solution to conflict in Baluchistan is most warranted by imitating a dialogue with the alienated Baluch elements in the interest of the people and the province to alleviate the sufferings of Baluch people and preempt any foreign meddling.

5. A systemic eradication of corruption from all spheres of state and society through an across-the-board accountability of all and under a transparent and a due process of law and credible institution. Promotion of good governance, democratic and tolerant culture and eradication of all patriarchal, inhuman and violent practices and authoritarian and fascist tendencies. All forms of discrimination on the basis of religion, sect, gender and ethnicity must come to an end, as envisioned by Father of Nation Mohammad Ali Jinnah, as a tolerant state that respect the religious and ethnic diversity of its people. An enlightened, civilised, progressive, inclusive and tolerant narrative should define the ethos of our state and society.

6. Pakistan can progress and survive as a democratic, inclusive, modern and peaceful federation on the basis of a sustainable productive base tuned to address the basic needs and social security of all its people while pursuing goals of regional economic cooperation rather than being entrapped in militaristic conflicts and becoming a pawn in the hands of competing international or regional powers.

7. A paradigm shift is required from a traditional national security state to a broader, inclusive and holistic vision of human security and development which serves the interests of its people, by providing them a good quality of life. A modern republic which is at peace with its people and with its neighbours on the basis of equality, dignity and peaceful resolution of bilateral disputes and mutually beneficial co-existence.

Those who have endorsed the Declaration are:

Politicians and elected representatives:

Senator Hasil Bizanjo (NP), Senator Raza Rabbani (PPP), MNA Ahsan Iqbal, Gen. Sec. PML-N, Farhatullah Babar, Gen Sec PPP-P, Senator Pervaiz Rashied (PMLN), Dr Maalick President NP, Mian Iftikhar Hussain Gen Sec ANP, Yousuf Masti Khan Pr. AWP, Afrasayab Khatak, politician, Lashkari Raisani, BNP, Ayub, NP, Dr Laal Khan, Farooq Tariq Lahore Left Front, Taimur Rehmat mran, GEN. Sec MKP, Dr Ammar, THKM, Jameel Soomro, PPP Sindh, Manzoor Gichki, BAM, and others.

Lawyers:

Abid Hassan Minto, Syed Amjad Ali Shah, VP PBC, Akhtar Hussain, Abid Saqi, Ahsan Bhon (Members PBC), Ali Ahmed Kurd, former Pre. SCBA, Kamran Murtaza, Former Pre. SCBA, Tahir Hussain, HRCP, Haider Khan Rizvi, KBA, Mohammed Yaseen Azad, SCBA, M. Aqil Pr. SHCBA, Lateef Afridi, Pre. PHCBA, Babar Sattar, Saiful Malook, Mr. Abid Feroze, VP KBA, Mr. Ameer Uddin, Barrister Ahmar J. Khan, Mr. Haider Imam Razvi Former Pr. KBA, Saroop, Habib Tahir, Zia Khan, KP, Mr. Abid Feroze, VP KBA, Ameer Uddin, Haider Imam Razvi, KBA, and over hundred lawyers.

Senior journalists/editors:

M. Ziauddin, senior editor and columnist, Ahmad Rashied, senior journalist, Zahid Hussain, author, columnist Dawn, Talat Hussain, editor and Anchor, Imtiaz Alam, Secretary General SAFMA, Hamid Mir, Anchor, Afzal Butt, Pres. PFUJ, Attaul Haq Qasmi, columnist Jang, khurshied, APNEC, Jabbar Khattak, Editor Awami Awaz Mohammed Amir/Editor, Asma Shirazi, Anchor, Iftikhar Ahmed, Anchor, Mazhar Abbas, Analyst, Absar Alam, Anchor, Khalid Farooqi, Editor Awaz, Maid Ali, The News, Zaibunnisa Burki, Dep Ed Oped The News, Mehmam Sarfraz, Analyst, Mohammed Siddique, Res Editor The News, Nasir Zaidi, Nasir Malik, PFUJ, Kazim Khan, Editor Daily Times, Raza Rumi, editor, Shehzada Zulfikar, senior journalist, Ahmed Waleed, Sama TV, Sirmed Manzoor, Gen Sec Safma Pakistan, Mustansar Javed, VP Safma Pak, Mohammed Tariq, Aaj Tv, Tanzeela, Sawm, Shafqat Bhutta, Gen. Sec. MUJ, Khalid Khokhar, Lala Rehman, HUJ, Lala Asad Pathan, SUJ, Ashraf Khan, Pres. KUJ, Ahmed Khan Malik, Sec. KUJ, Faran Khan, Karachi Press Club, Zulfikar Mehto, VP Lahore Press Club, Syed Hassan Abbas, Pr. KUJ, Aajiz Jamali, Sec. Gen. KUJ and other office bearers of press clubs across the country.

Civil society activists:

Haris Khalique, Gen Sec HRCP, Muna Baig, Director HRCP, Abid Ali Abid, Progressive Writers Association, Saleema Hashmi, Cultural and rights activist, Sheema Kirmani, artist and women rights activist, Nighat Saeed Khan, ASR, Peter Jacob, minorities rights activist, Rubina Saigal, woman rights activist, Qazi Javed, Sindh, Ashfaq Saleem Mirza, author, Khadim Hussain, Bacha Khan Centre, Tehseen, SAP, Irfan Mufti, SAP, Deep Saeed, Anis Haroon, NCHR, Uzma Noorani, HRCP, Salam Dharejo, Mir Zulfiqar Ali, WERO, Nazim Haji, Farhan Tanveer, Mahnaz Rehman, Aurat Foundation, Naghma Iqtidar, Social Activist, Ms. Javeria Younis.

Academics:

Dr Waseem, Dr Tariq, Dr Sarfraz, Dr Tariq, Dr Pervaiz Tahir, Dr Kaiser Bengali, Dr. Riaz Ahmed Shaikh, Maqsood Khaliq, ATPM. Soofi Mushtaq, Punjabi poet and others.

Trade union leaders

Karamat Ali, PILER and GEN. Sec. National Labour Council, Habibuddin Junaidi, Peoples Labour Bureau, Saeed Baloch, GEN Sec. Pakistan Fisherman Cooperative Society, Nasir Mansoor, Gen. Sec. National Trade Union Federation, Shaikh Majeed, PIA skyway Union.

Collective

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