



Defence of
Human Rights



Human Rights Commission of Pakistan



**Joint statement
30 August 2025**

PAKISTAN: Failure to address enforced disappearance perpetuates injustice against victims

Today, on International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances, eight human rights and civil society organizations highlight the systematic failure of the Pakistani authorities to stop enforced disappearance and provide truth, justice and reparations to victims and families of the disappeared in Pakistan.

Enforced disappearances continue to be routinely used by the Pakistani authorities as a tool to target dissidents and human rights defenders, with thousands of cases having been documented by local civil society organizations. The Defence of Human Rights (DHR) has documented 3,140 cases since 2006, of which 1,362 victims remain forcibly disappeared. This year, DHR has documented 32 new cases. Other grassroots and regional movements paint an equally grim picture: Baloch Yakjehti Committee (BYC) reports 546 cases of enforced disappearance between January to July 2025; Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM) has documented 133 cases; and Voice for Missing Persons of Sindh has reported 40 cases from January to July 2025.

According to official data from the government-formed Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances (COIED), a total of 10,592 cases were registered from 2010 to August 2025. Of these, COIED reported that 1,017 were sent to internment centres, 4,776 individuals returned home, 706 were located in prisons, and 293 were extrajudicially killed or found dead. Another 1,978 cases were disposed of on the grounds that they did not fall under the category of enforced disappearance.

Impunity fueled by ineffective legal system

Over 15 years since its establishment, the Commission has consistently failed to provide meaningful remedy to victims and their families. While the commission is empowered to issue production orders as formal directives instructing relevant state authorities to

produce the individual before a court of law, these orders have rarely been enforced. Although over 700 production orders have been issued to date, only a handful have been complied with. In many cases, families have waited for years, some for as long as six years without any action taken to implement these orders. While the commission does not have powers to prosecute, it can direct the relevant authorities to file case against suspects. There have been no prosecutions in any of the cases reported to the commission, underscoring systemic impunity. As of August 2025, 1,837 cases remain unresolved, with 140 new cases reported to the commission this year alone. This lack of compliance and accountability not only renders the commission ineffective but further traumatizes the families, who are left with a written orders but no justice.

Pakistan has not yet ratified the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (CPED) nor the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court which, under Article 7, classifies enforced disappearance, when committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack against any civilian population, as a crime against humanity. Likewise, there are no domestic laws that specifically criminalize enforced disappearances. Attempts by the legal system to address the issue have been ad hoc and ineffective. For instance, on 12 July 2025, the National Judicial Policy Making Committee (NJPMC), under Chief Justice Yahya Afridi, constituted a dedicated committee to formulate an “institutional response” on the issue of enforced disappearances in Pakistan. However, no consultations were held with families of those forcibly disappeared or human rights organizations, raising serious concerns about the committee’s inclusivity and accountability. Furthermore, the terms of reference of the committee have not been made public, contributing to a troubling lack of transparency regarding how the committee will function and what outcomes it seeks to achieve.

The UN Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances (WGEID) has repeatedly expressed concerns regarding laws and measures that have compounded the situation. These laws have aided repressive practices such as enforced disappearances where individuals are increasingly subject to short-term disappearances, only to return to face charges or prolonged detention under these laws. Pakistan’s National Assembly recently passed amendments to the Anti-Terrorism Act, 1997 to allow preventive detention by civil and military forces for up to 90 days. Other laws such the Army Act Amendments 2023, Official Secrets Act Amendments 2023, and the Actions (in Aid to Civil Power) Regulation 2011 have provided cover for arbitrary detention, secrecy and lack of due process, often giving “legal cover” to practices that allow for enforced disappearances.

Reprisals against families

Enforced disappearances impact families and entire communities, particularly in cases where it is targeted against ethnic minorities. These disappearances affect the families’ mental and physical health, financial status, and security and results in stigma and social isolation. Further, families and activists campaigning and protesting for the return

of their loved ones have been subject to surveillance, harassment and threats by the Pakistani authorities. Peaceful protests organized by families of the disappeared are often subject to state repression and have resulted in arbitrary arrests and unlawful use of force.

Violation of international and local laws

The practice of enforced disappearances constitutes a violation of Pakistan's international and domestic legal obligations. Internationally, Pakistan is bound by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which it ratified in 2010, particularly Articles 6, 7, 9, 10, 12, 14 and 17 which guarantee the right to liberty and security, right to fair trial, protect from arbitrary arrest or detention, and prohibit torture and arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy, family or home. Pakistan is also obligated under the Convention Against Torture, which it ratified in 2010, and Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions, which prohibit torture, arbitrary detention, extrajudicial killings, and collective punishment in non-international armed conflict. Domestically, these practices violate numerous constitutional rights guaranteed by the Constitution of Pakistan, including Article 9 (right to life and liberty), Article 10 (safeguards on arrest and detention), Article 10A (right to fair trial), Article 14 (inviolability of human dignity), and Articles 15 to 19A, which protect freedom of movement, assembly, association, speech, and access to information. Despite these clear legal protections, the Pakistani authorities continue use enforced disappearances as a tool to target political dissidents, activists, journalists, human rights defenders and other civilians, undermining its own constitution and international obligations.

Recommendations

On this International Day of the Victims of Enforced Disappearances the undersigned organizations urge Pakistani government to immediately end the practice of enforced disappearances, bring all those suspected of criminal responsibility to justice in fair trials before ordinary civilian courts and provide truth, justice and reparations to the victims and their families. Delayed justice has created an environment of impunity, underlining human rights in the country. We demand:

- An end to the practice of enforced disappearances and arbitrary and secret detentions;
- Immediate and unconditional disclosure of the fate and/or whereabouts of forcibly disappeared people to their families, and immediate release of all enforced disappeared individuals across Pakistan, including the release of detainees in internment centers, or that they be promptly presented before a judge in an independent civilian court to rule on the lawfulness of their detention;
- Ensure accountability for all cases of enforced disappearances through prompt, transparent, effective, independent and impartial investigations and that all those suspected of criminal responsibility are brought to justice through fair trials and without resource to the death penalty;

- Ratification, without any reservation, of the UN Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances (CPED) and the alignment of all domestic laws with the convention's principles;
- Recognition of the competence of the Committee on Enforced Disappearances to receive and consider communications from or on behalf of victims or other states parties to the Convention;
- Prompt accession to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court;
- Ratification of the Ljubljana-The Hague Convention on International Cooperation in the Investigation and Prosecution of the Crime of Genocide, Crimes against Humanity, War Crimes and Other International Crimes, without making any reservation;
- Abolition of military courts and reform of laws that legitimize enforced disappearances in Pakistan to comply with international human rights law and standards, including the Army Act Amendments 2023, Official Secrets Act Amendments 2023, and the Actions (in Aid to Civil Power) Regulation 2011, Protection of Pakistan Act 2014 and Anti-Terrorism Act, 1997;
- Reform of the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances and formation of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to address the issue comprehensively, providing truth, justice, closure, and compensation in line with international standards. The families of the disappeared must be incorporated as member representatives in the Commission;
- Comprehensive measures to prevent enforced disappearances, including the criminalization of enforced disappearances in Pakistan's domestic law through amendments to the Pakistan Penal Code and the accountability of those responsible and robust legal institutions that ensure accountability that conform to international human rights law, standards and best practice.

Signatories (in alphabetical order):

1. Amnesty International
2. Asian Federation Against Involuntary and Enforced Disappearances (AFAD)
3. Baloch Yakjehti Committee (BYC)
4. Defence of Human Rights (DHR)
5. Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP)
6. Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM)
7. Sindhian National Congress
8. Voice for Missing Persons of Sindh (VMPS)