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Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif
Prime Minister Office
Red Zone, Islamabad
Pakistan

OPEN LETTER: PAKISTAN MUST STOP UNLAWFUL DETENTION, HARASSMENT AND DEPORTATION OF AFGHAN REFUGEES

Dear Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif,

I am writing to you on behalf of Amnesty International to express our grave concern over the continued detention, harassment and mass deportation of Afghan nationals in Pakistan, including Afghan refugees and asylum seekers. Amnesty International calls on the Pakistani authorities to halt the deportation of Afghan refugees and ensure that individuals with international protection needs are safeguarded as per international human rights law. Pakistani authorities must ensure that the rights of Afghan refugees are protected, particularly protection from arbitrary detention and eviction from refugee camps and their accommodation.

Pakistan has been a generous host to refugees for over 40 years, providing shelter to refugees fleeing war and persecution from across the border. However, Pakistan's policy towards Afghan refugees has changed significantly since the 'Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan' was announced in September 2023, what might be one of the largest forcible returns of refugees in modern history. Since then, Amnesty International has [documented](#) a complete lack of transparency, due process and accountability in the unlawful arrests, detentions and deportations of Afghan nationals in Pakistan, which is exacerbated by increased harassment and hostility towards them.

Amnesty International considers the plan [unlawful](#) given that it violates international human rights principles, particularly the right to non-refoulement. The Plan, now in its third and final phase, calls for the indiscriminate deportation of all Afghan refugees from the country, without any formal safeguards for those at risk and with international protection needs.

This year has also marked a worrying escalation in the number of arrests and detention of refugees with the Pakistani authorities commencing both [phase two](#) and three of the Repatriation Plan, impacting Afghan Citizen Card (ACC) and [Proof of Registration \(PoR\) card](#) holders. According to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), arrests and detentions have increased tenfold as there have been more than 115,000 such cases since the start of the year. Across Pakistan, Amnesty International has observed the process of detention to be arbitrary and lacking any due process. Those detained are mostly taken to detention centers where they have little access to any legal representation or to their family members. In some cases, refugees have been arrested under the Foreigners Act, 1946 which allows for detention of foreigners deemed to have entered or stayed in the country illegally. Activists working with Afghan refugees have also reported that children have been among those detained and arrested.

According to the [International Organization for Migration](#) (IOM), 1,495,851 Afghan refugees have returned since the start of the deportation drive, with nearly half in 2025 alone (778,739). The process of deportation is swift, and limits have been placed on the amount of money and assets Afghans can take with them. In many cases, once detained, those deported are given no opportunity to gather their belongings. Further, no process is in place to ensure refugees with international protection needs, such as journalists, human rights defenders, women dissidents, former government officials and individuals who have worked with foreign governments and organizations, are provided exceptions. Reporters Without Borders [stated](#) that at least 20 Afghan journalists have been deported back to Afghanistan from Pakistan – others live in [constant anxiety](#). In the past two months, Amnesty International has received multiple reports of human rights defenders, including women, being arbitrarily detained and deported.

Afghan refugees are also being denied their right to adequate housing. The Pakistan government [de-notified](#) 16 Afghan refugee camps in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan and Punjab this September and all [28 Afghan refugee camps](#) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in October. In Karachi, over 1,200 houses of Afghan refugees were [demolished](#) in October. The provincial government in Punjab has announced a [policy](#) of registering cases against landlords renting out property to Afghan nationals. Immediately after the orders, dozens of criminal cases were filed against landlords in [Lahore](#), [Rawalpindi](#) and [Attock](#). Families are being forced into informal [camps](#) as winter approaches. In late November, at least 400 families were forcibly removed by the police authorities from a park in Islamabad.

In May 2025, the UNHCR [stated](#) that 110,000 refugees and asylum seekers in Pakistan had both high-risk profiles with international protection needs. Under the Taliban's current rule in Afghanistan, Amnesty International has documented extrajudicial executions, arbitrary arrests, torture, enforced disappearances of dissenting voices, journalists, human rights defenders, artists, and former government employees, among others. The draconian restrictions on the rights of Afghanistan's women and girls, together with the use of imprisonment, enforced disappearance, torture and other ill-treatment, may amount to the crime against humanity of gender persecution.

Forcibly repatriating Afghan refugees and asylum seekers at risk from Pakistan would be a clear breach of the principle of non-refoulement: the right not to be sent back to a country where one might be at real risk of serious human rights violations. Pakistan is obligated under international human rights law, particularly the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention Against Torture to respect the absolute prohibition to return anyone, including Afghan refugees, to a country where they would be at real risk of being subjected to torture or other serious human rights violations.

Amnesty International urges the Pakistan government to:

- Immediately stop the arbitrary arrests, detentions and harassment of Afghan refugees, reverse the decision to forcibly return refugees and formally suspend the 'Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan' in line with Pakistan's international legal obligations including the principle of non-refoulement.
- Create well-resourced and accessible pathways for the registration of refugees, taking proactive measures to expedite the registration of refugees particularly at risk, including but not limited to women and girls, journalists, and those belonging to minority and ethnic communities, and those facing barriers due to gender, disability, language, among others.
- Ratify the 1951 Refugees Convention and its 1967 Protocol.
- Develop a comprehensive national legal framework for asylum and other forms of international protection in line with international refugee law and amend the Foreigners Act to prevent penalization of refugees and asylum seekers entering and residing in Pakistan.

Pakistan has a history of welcoming refugees seeking safety into its borders, hosting Afghan refugees for more than 40 years, and Amnesty International urges the government to continue this practice and not abandon those at risk in their hour of need.

I wish to thank you for your attention to this urgent matter and would be grateful for your response to this.

Yours Sincerely,



Agnes Callamard
Amnesty International Secretary General