

## Pakistan

1. Overview of the human rights and democracy situation: The 2018 general elections marked the second democratic transition in Pakistan, leading to changes of government at the federal and provincial levels. The EU deployed an Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) led by Michael Gahler, Member of the European Parliament, to observe the July general elections. The EU EOM found that the positive changes made to the Pakistani electoral legal framework were overshadowed by restrictions on freedom of expression and unequal campaign opportunities. The presence of military personnel inside polling stations, restraints on women's participation and that of people with disabilities and the separate electoral roll for the Ahmadis, were also identified as shortcomings. EU spokesperson statements were issued in July 2018 in reaction to bomb attacks targeting electoral rallies.

Journalists' and human rights defenders' voices continue to be silenced under the pretext of national security. Gross human rights violations such as enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings and torture continued to take place with impunity mainly in Balochistan. The misuse of blasphemy laws and related violence remain a matter of great concern. The October 2018 Supreme Court ruling overturning the death sentence for blasphemy in the case of Asia Bibi was upheld by the Court's decision of 29 January 2019 not to hear the submitted review petition. The interfaith harmony policy is still due to be passed in Parliament. Progress on the legal front has been made in the area of women's and children's rights, but still requires effective implementation. The review of the catalogue of offenses carrying the death penalty is on the agenda of the government. The number of executions continues to show a significantly decreasing trend, with 14 cases in 2018, from 44 in 2017. The EU regrets that Pakistan's vote for the UN resolution abolishing the Death Penalty was withdrawn as a technical error.

2. EU action - key focus areas: The EU continued to focus its efforts in the following key priority areas: i) freedom of expression, ii) freedom of religion or belief, iii) women's rights and gender equality, iv) death penalty and v) rule of law and access to justice.

Press freedom was under attack before the general elections and this worrying trend has not receded. The shrinking space for civil society organisations (CSOs), including international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) remains an issue. The EU and like-minded partners issued a joint local statement in December 2018 on the situation of INGOs, pointing to the willingness to maintain a constructive and regular dialogue with Pakistan on the country's registration policy and its implementation.

Several interfaith events took place throughout the year where the EU and its Member States were represented. Ján Figel', the European Commission's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief outside the EU, visited Pakistan for a second time in 2018 as part of the EU's initiative on a "Citizens Roundtable – charting pathways for pluralism", a seminar engaging interlocutors from the federal and provincial governments, religious leaders, human rights practitioners, academia and students.

Human rights awareness-raising was also part of the EU's public diplomacy. The EU Delegation, in collaboration with the Swedish Embassy, UN Women and the Pakistani

Potohar Organization for Development Advocacy (PODA), organised two public readings of the documentary play SEVEN in Karachi and in Quetta, promoting access to justice for women by raising awareness of Pakistan's existing legal framework on violence against women.

To commemorate the European and World Day against Death Penalty, an op-ed by the EU Head of Delegation published in the English and Urdu press while a live screening of a play on the death penalty was attended by a broad spectrum of Pakistani civil society.

On the occasion of International Human Rights Day in December, the EU, together with the UN and 27 EU and non-EU countries, organized a highly successful Human Rights Film Festival reaching over 4000 students and policy makers.

3. EU bilateral political engagement: Dialogue and cooperation between the EU and the Pakistani Ministry of Human Rights continued to be constructive, with a strong potential to advance many important human rights topics.

The EU participated in the first ever International Conference on Human Rights in Islamabad in February, and stressed the importance of freedom of expression and the need to protect human rights defenders.

The biennial report on the implementation of GSP+ was issued in January and was followed by a GSP+ monitoring mission to Pakistan in October. The key issues discussed with Pakistani authorities related among others to enforced disappearances and secret detention, the use of torture, the death penalty, the high prevalence of child labour, freedom of association and of expression, and Pakistan's cooperation with UN supervisory mechanisms and reporting obligations.

The 9<sup>th</sup> meeting of the EU-Pakistan Joint Commission and its Subgroup on Governance and Human Rights in November 2018 provided an opportunity to discuss the human rights preoccupations of both sides and to identify the challenges requiring continued attention.

4. EU financial engagement: The EU and its Member States implemented projects in all human rights focus areas. The contracting of a 9.6 million Euro project on the 'Promotion of Human Rights in Pakistan' in 2018 is considered a milestone initiative in EU-Pakistan development cooperation on human rights. The EU and Pakistan also signed a Financing Agreement at the end of 2018 on a project providing 'Support to Parliamentary Development in Pakistan' amounting to 15 million Euros.

5. Multilateral context: Pakistan's membership of the Human Rights Council (HRC) from 2018 until 2020 enables the country to engage with the EU and the wider international community on human rights issues in international fora. It also provides an opportunity for Pakistan to act as an example as regards implementation of human rights obligations domestically. Pakistan acted as coordinator on behalf of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in Geneva. The HRC resolution on Myanmar, jointly presented by EU and the OIC, was a very positive step.

The EU encourages Pakistan to accept individual complaint procedures under those UN conventions that provide for them, and to issue a standing invitation to UN Special Procedure mandate holders and to expedite decisions on pending requests for visits.