

[Statement] Pakistan: Grave Concerns on the Reemergence of Pakistan Taliban, Tehreek-e-Taliban

(Bangkok/Kathmandu, 9 September 2022) - The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) is deeply concerned about the lack of transparency and the exclusion of civil society in the ongoing 'peace' talks between the Government of Pakistan and the outlawed *Tehreek-e-Taliban* (TTP) Pakistan, also known as Pakistan Taliban, in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

Although the civilian leadership and the local communities primarily bore the brunt of TTP's gross human rights violations in the region, they have been systematically excluded from the peace talks. As reported, talks had begun clandestinely with Pakistan sending a secret delegation to Afghanistan to hold talks with TTP in January while the Afghan Taliban acknowledged its role as a mediator in these talks. The talks with TTP now allow them undue impunity for their past and current human rights violations.

The UN Security Council imposed sanctions on the TTP in 2011 citing the group's linkages to Al-Qaeda. The Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021 has bolstered the outlawed TTP, followed by the sudden rise of the Pakistan Taliban in the Malakand division and other districts of erstwhile FATA (Federally Administered Tribal Areas).

"We are gravely concerned that TTP's growing presence might have the same implications on the rights of women as in Afghanistan; intensifying their restrictions on right to education and work, mobility, and participation in public life," said FORUM-ASIA.

The growing presence of TTP is particularly concerning for civil society organizations, human rights defenders, especially women human rights defenders, media as well as local communities, especially the indigenous and ethnoreligious minorities such as Hazaras and Shias are especially at risk of intensified persecution.

The TTP has claimed its return pursuant to an agreement with the government without an official declaration by the same. Between August 2021 and March 2022, over 119 Pakistani soldiers and hundreds of civilians were killed by TTP. There are also reports of extortion where those refusing to pay were attacked with grenades at their homes and businesses in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The growing militancy and rising violence in the region have heightened fear and self-censorship amongst the civil society groups and media in the region. For example, in the Swat district, the police lodged FIRs against peaceful protestors for allegedly 'chanting slogans against security forces and defaming state institutions'. This is a blatant violation of the constitutionally guaranteed freedoms of expression, assembly, and association.

The peace talks with TTP set a dangerous precedent as it emboldened an outfit responsible for severe terror attacks, such as the Peshawar School massacre where 150 perished, of whom at least 134 were students. FORUM-ASIA calls on the Government of Pakistan to:

- Uphold the fundamental freedoms of expression, assembly, and association and hold TTP accountable for their human rights violations.
- Any and all talks with the TTP must be inclusive of local communities to ensure reparation and justice to victims of TTP's past atrocities. The government must stop alienating the voices of the people from the region and address their demand for accountability, peace, justice, and security while negotiating with TTP.
- The government should end harassment and reprisals against all people questioning the peace talks, and people at risk such as human rights defenders, activists, and the media should be protected

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About FORUM-ASIA:

The Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA) is a network of 85 member organisations across 23 countries, mainly in Asia. Founded in 1991, FORUM-ASIA works to strengthen movements for human rights and sustainable development through research, advocacy, capacity development and solidarity actions in Asia and beyond. It has consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, and consultative relationship with the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights. The FORUM-ASIA Secretariat is based in Bangkok, with offices in Jakarta, Geneva and Kathmandu. www.forum-asia.org

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