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**Written statement* submitted by Centre for Gender Justice
and Women Empowerment, a non-governmental
organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[5 February 2023]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.

Freedom of Press in Balochistan: From Bad to Worse

Centre for Gender Justice and Women Empowerment

52nd session of the Human Rights Council (27 February 2023 – 04 April 2023)

Centre for Gender Justice and Women Empowerment would like to draw the attention of the Council to the situation of press freedom in Pakistan, which has gone from bad to worse in recent months. Pakistan has registered a steep decline of 12 ranks in just one year in the World Press Freedom Index (from 145 in 2021 to 157 in 2022).¹

Recent reports from Pakistan-based independent media, civil liberties organizations and Freedom Network revealed that journalists in Pakistan had been targeted mainly through state actors in the past year (May 2021 to April 2022). They mentioned various instances of physical violence, legal action, kidnapping, police detentions and threats. In addition, they cited 86 cases of attacks on journalists across Pakistan. The highest number of attacks -32 - were recorded in Islamabad's capital territory.²

The report also mentioned 35 documented cases³ where state functionaries targeted journalists in Pakistan, with the highest number of attacks on journalists' homes. The death of two journalists was also reported⁴. However, media and journalism are facing the brunt of repressive activities by the security forces of Pakistan. Reacting to the recent imposition of section 144 in the port city of Gwadar for one month, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), in its statement, said that "it is now imperative for the state to abandon its second-tier policy for Balochistan.⁵ reiterating that a free press is vital to any democratic dispensation and allows for coverage of all prevailing viewpoints, however disparate. The stifling of the press directly impinges upon freedom of expression".

For reporting various human rights violations in Balochistan, the Balochistan government has stopped advertisements in three local newspapers; Daily Inthekhab, Balochistan Express and Daily Azadi.⁶ The situation for maintaining press clubs or the distribution of newspapers has become worse in recent months as 15 press clubs remain closed. In addition, there are reports of attacks on the Hub press club and a newspaper shop in Turbat.⁷

Repression of the media by the Pakistani government is nothing new in Pakistan. Even in 2017, the Council of Pakistan Newspaper Editors declared press freedom in Balochistan as extremely bad and contrary to democratic standards."⁸

Under Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, "everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers."

Further, the rights contained under article 19 of the ICCPR comprise three core tenets: the right to hold opinions without interference (freedom of thought), the right to seek and receive information (access to information), and the right to impart knowledge (freedom of expression). While a considerable body of treaty law protects freedom of expression, it can also be regarded as a principle of customary international law, given how the principle is frequently enunciated in treaties and other soft law instruments.

The state-sponsored repression by the Pakistani government has put severe pressure and hindrances by restricting access to even the most basic human rights. Accordingly, we call upon the Council to immediately intervene to protect the freedom of speech and expression from the repressive measures against the freedom of the press. Furthermore, this Council should call upon the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to stop such actions and fulfil its international obligations.

1. <https://rsf.org/en/rsf-s-2022-world-press-freedom-index-new-era-polarisation-0>
2. <https://www.fnpk.org/fn-press-freedom-report-2022-islamabad-riskiest-city-for-journalists/>
3. <https://www.fnpk.org/fn-press-freedom-report-2022-islamabad-riskiest-city-for-journalists/>
4. <https://www.fnpk.org/fn-press-freedom-report-2022-islamabad-riskiest-city-for-journalists/>
5. [https://hrcp-web.org/hrcpweb/freedom-of-press-and-expression-needs-to-be-restored-inbalochistan /](https://hrcp-web.org/hrcpweb/freedom-of-press-and-expression-needs-to-be-restored-inbalochistan/)
6. [https://hrcp-web.org/hrcpweb/freedom-of-press-and-expression-needs-to-be-restored-inbalochistan /](https://hrcp-web.org/hrcpweb/freedom-of-press-and-expression-needs-to-be-restored-inbalochistan/)
7. [https://hrcp-web.org/hrcpweb/freedom-of-press-and-expression-needs-to-be-restored-inbalochistan /](https://hrcp-web.org/hrcpweb/freedom-of-press-and-expression-needs-to-be-restored-inbalochistan/)
8. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1366136>