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Responses to Information Requests

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Pakistan: Summary of key political events during the period August 2008 to October 2008; changes in the availability of state protection, in the security situation and in the human rights situation during that period
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

Political events

In August 2008, Pakistan's coalition government, composed of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and the Pakistan Muslim League of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif (PML-N), initiated impeachment proceedings against the president, General Pervez Musharraf (BBC 9 Sept. 2008; *ibid.* 1 Oct. 2008; see also AI 10 Sept. 2008; *Washington Post* 7 Sept. 2008). Musharraf subsequently resigned from the presidency in August 2008 (BBC 1 Oct. 2008; AI 10 Sept. 2008; *Washington Post* 7 Sept. 2008). According to the *Washington Post* and the International Crisis Group, the PPP and PML-N coalition broke up shortly after Musharraf's resignation due to disagreement over whether to reinstate judges fired by Musharraf in 2007 (*Washington Post* 7 Sept. 2008; International Crisis Group 16 Oct. 2008, i). Both the International Crisis Group and *Dawn* state that the PML-N has criticized the PPP for failing to restore the deposed judges to office (International Crisis Group 16 Oct. 2008, 1-2; *Dawn* 27 Oct. 2008). In September 2008, Asif Ali Zardari, the head of the PPP and the widower of Benazir Bhutto, was elected by legislators as president of Pakistan (BBC 9 Sept. 2008; *ibid.* 1 Oct. 2008; *Washington Post* 7 Sept. 2008).

A scholar who specializes in Pakistan at the Middle East Institute (MEI), a Washington, DC-based organization that focuses on increasing knowledge of the Middle East (MEI n.d.), stated that the Pakistani government is being "severely tested" by economic concerns and is currently focussed on issues such as meeting debt repayments (22 Oct. 2008; see also *Dawn* 25 Oct. 2008). The Scholar expressed his opinion that Zardari is "not very strong" and that his government may not last a long time (22 Oct. 2008). The Scholar stated that there is internal disagreement within the ruling coalition regarding, for example, policy on the Pakistani Taliban (22 Oct. 2008). According to the Scholar, important issues for the government are its policy toward extremists (22 Oct. 2008; see also BBC 9 Sept. 2008) and its relationship with the military (Scholar 22 Oct. 2008). The *International Herald Tribune (IHT)* states in a 27 September 2008 article that Zardari is committed to "fighting terrorism."

Media sources indicate that at a 14 October 2008 meeting in Lahore, the Muttahaeda [Muttahida] Ulema Council (MUC), a group of Muslim clerics, unanimously issued a *fatwa* [religious ruling] against suicide attacks (APP 14 Oct. 2008; *Daily Times* 15 Oct. 2008; Asia News 15 Oct. 2008), declaring such attacks *haram* (unlawful) and *najaez* (unjustified) (APP 14 Oct. 2008). Interior Ministry Advisor Rehman Malik welcomed the declaration by the clerics (*Daily Times* 15 Oct. 2008; Asia News 15 Oct. 2008). According to the *Daily Times*, clerics from the Jamaat Ahl-e-Sunnah, Ahl-e-Tashee, Ahl-e-Hadith, Jamaat e-Islami, Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam, Sipah-e-Sahaba and Deobandi and Bareilvi schools of thought attended the meeting (15 Oct. 2008; see also APP 14 Oct. 2008). The group of Muslim clerics stated that "only the state has the authority to proclaim *jihad* (holy war), not individuals or groups" (Asia News 15 Oct. 2008; *Daily Times* 15 Oct. 2008).

State protection

Specific information on changes to the availability of state protection could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

Security

According to a 7 October 2008 *IHT* article, violence in Pakistan has increased substantially since 2007. The United States (US) Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC) indicates in an October 2008 bulletin that "[s]ectarian and extremist violence has resulted in fatal bomb attacks in Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Karachi, Peshawar, Quetta, Lahore, and other Pakistani cities in 2006, 2007 and 2008" (US 1 Oct. 2008). In September 2008, a suicide bombing occurred at the Marriott Hotel in Islamabad, resulting in over 50 casualties (*IHT* 2 Oct. 2008; *ibid.* 7 Oct. 2008; CBC 2 Oct. 2008; US 1 Oct. 2008). Both the *IHT* and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) report that, in October 2008, the United Nations (UN) upgraded its security level in Pakistan and instructed the dependents of international staff to leave the country (*IHT* 2 Oct. 2008; CBC 2 Oct. 2008).

Human rights

Information on changes to the human rights situation in Pakistan could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate. However, a September 2008 statement by Amnesty International (AI) urges the Pakistani government to address the following human rights issues in Pakistan: enforced disappearances, the restoration of judges deposed by former president Musharraf in November 2007, the roughly 7,000 people on death row and the protection of civilians in Pakistan's tribal regions (AI 10 Sept. 2008).

Several sources provide information on honour killings in Pakistan (*Dawn* 22 Oct. 2008; *ibid.* 18 Sept. 2008; *ibid.* 30 Aug. 2008; *The Nation* 16 Sept. 2008; FIDH 21 Aug. 2008; *The News* 13 Sept. 2008). According to a 22 October 2008 *Dawn* article, in the previous three months, 38 women in Balochistan had been killed by relatives in honour killings. The same article states that, between July 2008 and September 2008, 46 women were killed and that 220 cases of violence against women were reported (*Dawn* 22 Oct. 2008). Most of the cases occurred in the districts of Nasirabad and Jaffarabad (*ibid.*).

Both *Dawn* and the International Federation of Human Rights (Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l'homme, FIDH) provide information regarding a specific incident where five women were shot and/or buried alive in Balochistan province reportedly because three of them wanted to marry a person of their own choosing (*Dawn* 30 Aug. 2008; FIDH 21 Aug. 2008). According to both *Dawn* and *The News*, Senator Zehri of Balochistan argued that the killings were justified as they followed tribal custom (*Dawn* 30 Aug. 2008; *The News* 13 Sept. 2008). *The News*, an English language newspaper in Pakistan, states in a 13 September 2008 article that Senator Zehri informed Senator Shah of Sindh province that "a death squad comprising 12 tribesmen had been dispatched to assassinate her [Shah] for raising the issue of [the] burial of five women in Balochistan."

According to the Associated Press of Pakistan (APP), Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Sherry Rehman reported that the Senate unanimously condemned the Balochistan honour killing and that the "government is seriously committed to its agenda to curb anti-women practices" (3 Sept. 2008). The APP indicates that Rehman declared that legislation on honour killing should be re-examined (3 Sept. 2008).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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Oral sources: An official at the Middle East Institute (MEI) was unable to provide information.

Internet sites, including: Freedom House, Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), Human Rights Group of Pakistan (HRGP), Human Rights Watch (HRW), Pakistan International Human Rights Organization (PIHRO), South Asia Analysis Group, United States (US) Department of State.

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