

## **Post 9/11 situation affecting lives and livelihoods of the people of Pakistan**

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The 11th September incident has had a devastating effect on politics, economics and livelihoods of the people of Pakistan, polarizing divergent forces to an extent never seen before. The military led government despite having signed Global Compact went on compromising on the rights of the people with a plea to give more attention to the security in terms of defence needs, more stringent laws to curb civil liberties and labour rights in the name of curbing extremist groups in the so-called war against terrorism.

As consequence of 9/11, the security situation became a major excuse for curbing people's rights including their right to livelihood, security of movement and limited their choices. The focus of attention has been the security in terms of armed defence leaving aside the security of people and law income groups, employees and labour was hit hardily. The government introduced an ordinance in 2000 to fire any government employee without assigning any legal reason or due legal procedures. The ordinance ISO 2000 is proving to be a hanging sword on the neck of the government employees. The employees have no relief if they are fired or demoted to accommodate military personnel against civilian posts. More than 1000 top civilian posts have been filled with the retired and serving personnel from the armed forces.

Similarly, Industrial Relations Ordinance 2002 deprives the workers of their fundamental rights. Their rights to form trade unions and to move labour courts to get relief if they are fired or rendered unemployed have been snatched. Employees of Banks and most of the public sector corporations have been deprived to the right to form professional trade unions. All such anti workers and people laws enjoy full protections of the military rulers and they can not be challenged.

The price mechanism and livelihood opportunities are in entirely different directions. At one side due to government's steps in the name of fiscal discipline to fulfill the conditionalities of IMF and other IFIs prices of utilities have been raised beyond all limits, the policies have been implemented that have deprived thousands of people from their means of livelihoods. Retrenchments and downsizing are being done in the name of right sizing. At one hand, thousands of low and middle income employees are being sent home, hundreds of retired and serving military and civilian have been re-hired on high salary as consultants thus creating imbalance in this sector.

After 11th September, it is clear that American government has got new friends. They have lifted sanctions against Pakistan and have announced a good friendship relationship with the military regime. The general impression is created that the American aid would help the sick economy of Pakistan. But this is not true. Pakistan's exports have been deeply affected since September 11th. Many export orders have been cancelled or postponed.

Though post 9/11 situation brought some kind of relief in aid and loans from the United States and on their behalf, the IFIs but main crisis of Pakistan's economy remains the lack of productivity. That is decreasing even further. All the conditions of the IMF and World Bank have made the life of the workers and peasants even worse than before the military took over in October 1999. In these circumstances, the revival of the Pakistan

economy does not seem possible – even if US imperialism pumps in massive injections as Pakistan has become a country that does not care for the poor as 40% people are living below the poverty line.

Though IMF extended three years poverty reduction and growth facility to Pakistan as it did for over 70 countries including whole of South Asia, poverty in Pakistan did not seem declining. Aid is making the life of the rich and the ruling class better, but not the life of the workers. The US aid literally making a difference to the possible length of the military regime. Before 11th September, the regime was losing its social base quite rapidly. But the terrorist attack and its U-turn towards American imperialism has earned Gen Musharraf good new political friends. The regime has strengthened its position for the time being and that too at the cost of the people's rights.

The U-turn of the military regime in favour of the US has many negative aspects. It has given a new life to the fanatic forces. It has endangered the life of the common people and progressive forces within Pakistan. The labour movement has to oppose American intervention. But it cannot close its eyes to the growing influence of the religious fundamentalists. The religious fundamentalist forces are in contradiction with US imperialism, but workers cannot gain by siding with either of these forces against the other.

Painting a grim human rights scenario in Pakistan in the year 2002, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), an independent body of activists and is renowned for its fearless campaigns for human rights in Pakistan, said the human rights situation in the country remained dismal in year 2002, adding that the international war against terrorism was also resulting in further degradation of human rights. It said that international powers were ignoring the human rights abuses in Pakistan for ensuring the country's support. It could be construed as a reference to the U.S. and its operations in the hunt for the Al-Qaeda and the Taliban.

The report, which was released by I.A. Rehman, Asma Jehangir and Hina Jilani, said such legislative and executive measures which curtailed the personal liberties of the citizens' right such as amendment in the Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA) were being ignored by the international community. It said that after amendment in ATA, any citizen, suspected of terrorism, could be detained for one year without registration of a case.

According to the Anti-terrorist (Amendment) Ordinance 2002, Pakistan's Anti-terrorist Court (ATC) has the jurisdiction to try cases of kidnapping, hostage taking, hijacking and inciting hatred against religious sects or ethnic groups. Cases at ATCs used to be presided over by a sessions judge. Being exceptional jurisdictions, anti-terrorist courts raise many serious issues such as their functioning, composition and thus their independence and impartiality. The due process of a trial requires respect for the fundamental rights of the defence and independence and impartiality of the judiciary. Obviously, these conditions are not fulfilled in this case. This decision was seen "another blow to the judiciary and their freedom".

Though it is necessary to sanction the perpetrators of sectarian violence and terrorist acts in a prompt manner, any such repression must respect the universal principles of protection of human rights and the framework of international legality.

International and national rights groups demanded to comply with provisions of international law and in particular with article 10 of the Universal Declaration of Human rights according to which "everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing

by an independent and impartial tribunal”; article 14 of the international Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, (not ratified by Pakistan) according to which “everyone shall be entitled to a fair and public hearing by a competent, independent and impartial tribunal established by law”; and principle 5 of the Basic principles on the Independence of the Judiciary: “ Everyone shall have the right to be tried by ordinary courts or tribunals using established legal procedures. Tribunals that do not use the duly established procedures of the legal process shall not be created to displace the jurisdiction belonging to the ordinary courts or judicial tribunals”.

The HRCP said that the promise of restoration of democracy was not honestly respected. "A series of extraordinary constitutional amendments, orders and ordinances, introduced both before and after the October 10 elections, effectively shifted the locus of power from elected representatives to the un-elected president of the country and the military-dominated National Security Council (NSC)."

About the emergence of religious parties on the political horizon, the HRCP leaders said it was `not without design". All such measures, it said, were designed to ensure that there was no real transfer of power. The HRCP also rejected election of the president through referendum. "The voters cast multiple ballots at will."

President Musharraf promulgated as many as 176 legislative measures alone bypassing the parliament and any democratic traditions. This is unprecedented in the history of Pakistan. He even gave extension to his office of the chief of the army staff. About the judiciary, the HRCP said, the Supreme Court dismissed all the petitions challenging the acts of the military ruler, and borrowed the expression of the Supreme Court Bar Association that the "judiciary has ceased to be independent."

The year, the HRCP report said, was difficult for the women and the children, as a number of women became victims to jirga decisions, acid burning, kidnapping and honour killing. On law and order, the HRCP report said there were nine major incidents of terrorism, all directed at Western missions, foreign or Christian places of worship or work. It said that extra judicial killings increased as compared to the previous year. At least 236 people were killed in such encounters. More than 50 people fell victim to target killing. Action Aid Pakistan has been actively involved in all sorts of national and local level initiatives to counter the government’s moves to curb freedom of information and human rights. Action Aid extended full support to the people’s rights movements in this regard. The country programme facilitated activities to repeal the Hudood Ordinance and labour laws depriving the labour of their right to form trade unions and their right to seek justice. Action Aid adopted a pro-people stand on all controversial legislation in the country. AAPk also organized workshops and seminars to make people aware of the negative consequences of the policies adopted by the government on the behest of the IFIs. AAPk also raised voice against the so-called anti real development big projects. AAPk under its emergency programme extended help to the Afghan refugees.

AAPk launched campaign for peace. A pen and peace conference and exchange of delegations between India and Pakistan were facilitated. On December 26, a Pakistani farmers delegation sponsored by AAPk returned after having a tour to India where the members of the delegation spoke on peace among farming communities of the two country. AAPk have extensively done food rights and water rights campaigns. It focused on the impacts of WTO agreements on Pakistan’s agriculture and the farming communities. On the count of labour rights, AAPk launched a gender justice campaign.

Critically visualizing the post 9/11 situation, AAPk took appropriate actions to support and uphold the rights of the people by promoting rights based approach through its programmes and campaigns.

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