



# Balochistan in Pakistan – a crisis

A report of a conference on this topic in Berlin, 2019

By Hans Noot, HRWF

On 11 December 2019, Baloch Human Rights Council organized a conference in Berlin entitled “Humanitarian Challenges in Balochistan”.

A number of speakers addressed the various facets of the repression: the exploitation of the Balochs, the atrocities committed against the civil population, the religious radicalization threat, the silence and the passivity of the international community.

Speakers included: Abdullah Abas (General Secretary Baloch Human Rights Council), Taj Baloch (chairperson Baloch Human Rights Council), Qambar Malik (information secretary Baloch Human Rights Council), Dr. Hidayat Bhutto (General Secretary World Sindhi Congress), Ralph Bunche (Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization), Hans Noot (Human Rights Without Frontiers), Sigried Krieg (Amnesty International), Dr. Lakhu Luhana (World Sindhi Congress), Nasseer Dashti (Executive Pres. of Baloch HR Council), Mr. Fernando Burgés (Head of Policy Research UNPO), Dr Ariel Ahearn (University of Oxford), Mr Stephan Lampe (Berlin Rep. World Uyghur Congress), Padima

Dolma, Dr. Zsuzsa Anna Ferency, Mr Sefan Sibenrock (Spokesman, Society for Threatened Peoples International).

## ***Pakistan’s exploitation of Balochistan***

Balochistan, the southern region of Pakistan, houses the Baloch people. Much like the Kurds, the Baloch are split up into different nations; in this case South-Eastern Iran, Southern Afghanistan, and Baloch Province in Pakistan, the largest of its provinces. During his [intervention speech](#) at the 41<sup>st</sup> session of the UNHRC on July 3<sup>rd</sup> 2019 Jashamsaid Amiri, representative of the Baloch Human Rights Council, highlighted the worsening human rights situation in Balochistan. He emphasized that “the security forces of Pakistan and the Ayatollahs in Iran have for decades been following a policy of disenfranchising the Baloch of their socio-cultural values. They have curbed their economic rights and political freedom. These have led the Baloch down the way of destruction. The state brutalities have resulted in a humanitarian crisis in Balochistan”.

### **Poverty and poor living conditions**

Ninety three percent of the houses in Balochistan have no electricity or running water. Sixty two percent of the people have no access to safe drinking water, a basic human right. The Baloch people have one of the lowest literacy rates in the world, showing that only 2% of those living in rural areas can read and write. Its mortality rate of 758/100,000 is three times as high as the rest of Pakistan. And the neo natal death rate is 150/1,000. Forty nine percent of the women in Balochistan suffer from malnutrition; and to more than half of the children below five years of age it causes stunted growth. The Baloch hold the world's record of percentage of children out of school, thus perpetuating the poverty and backward situation for generations to come. These people are doomed under a regime of social, economic, and political exclusion.

### **Atrocities**

There is fear in the air of Balochistan, a fright for the Pakistan government. The State Security agencies, or sometimes proxy death squads supported by them, bomb and raid villages, burn down houses, and leave the women and children care for themselves. When their houses are destroyed and possessions are stolen by the perpetrators, women are often asked for sexual favors and can then choose between either living alone with their traumatized children in the arid mountainous desert, or flee the region altogether. There is an estimate of 50 thousand Baloch refugees in Pakistan alone, and another 100 thousand in neighboring Sindh province. Many also flee into Iran.

For the men the story is a bit different. When found present in the village that is being raided, they are either killed on the spot extrajudicially, or abducted. As a consequence a form of forced displacement takes effect, as they attempt to flee elsewhere worldwide with nothing more than a memory of their family in

distress, and the clothes on their backs. There are lists of names with a total of about twenty thousand Baloch men who were forced to disappeared since the turn of the century. And for those whom I met in Europe, they found very little hope for jobs, or for returning to their loved ones. Those who were caught and abducted become part of the 4,723 so called "kill-and-dump" policy of the past three years alone. In 2017 people were protesting against the seven thousand missing. And since then [Amnesty International](#) has reported a thousand bodies have been found, sometimes in mass graves. Many of them mutilated with a long vertical scar along the front of their torso and some of the internal organs missing, presumably for organ harvesting, a sign that some people in the medical world are involved.

For the women who pursue a hope in finding judicial redress, they need to find the cash to travel to Lahore, and stay there for months on end, only to find no less than an impenetrable bureaucracy. If the victims are not apprehended by the police, while going through these long processes, their lack of funding and police support leaves them vulnerable to exploitation.

Some have asserted that the combination of murders, collected punishments, forced disappearances, abductions, and women having to live by themselves without their husbands, can be labeled as a form of genocide. This claim is all the more strengthened as already traumatized victims are vilified and perpetrators get away without impunity, under the umbrella of "national security".

### **Social changes and extremist threats**

Balochistan is traditionally governed in tribal structured politics. By nature they are not the type of Muslims that desire to politicize Islam. And yet, amongst the Baloch, even without the direct interference from policy making in Lahore, not all can be labeled harmonious.

There is some struggle between those who want independence from Pakistan, and those who do not. And forms of extremism creeps into the culture. For example, strangely enough, in the aftermath of the [2013 earth quake in Balochistan](#), it was the charity organization Filah Isaniyat Foundation (FIF), which was banned by Pakistan, that was the most active in the field to provide relief work. Lashkar-Khurasan, an affiliate of ISIS, murdered six members of Zikri Baloch and was involved in an attack against Baloch resistance forces in Balnigwar in 2016. And Islam organizations such as Lashkare-Jhangvi (LeJ), Ahl Sunnat wa Jamaat (ASWJ), ISIS and Daesh have all begun taking roots in Balochistan in complicity with the Pakistan Military establishment.

One should not be surprised to find that spreading from the Northern Pashtun region into the south, madrassas (religious schools) are taking over from the original secular schools. No wonder this is possible, when one considers that regular schools are often attacked and threatened by extremists. With their number of 16.000 in Punjab, and another 13,000 currently throughout Balochistan, the madrassas have the upper hand in education. This seems to be part of the so called [Tablighi Jamaat phenomenon](#) - a revival of Islam education program. And as a consequence Balochistan is increasingly becoming a breeding ground for terrorism. With this ideology comes billions of dollars worth of drug trade in order to fund the military, which is all too happy to fill its coffers for so called security operations. The University of Balochistan is monitored by 700 military personnel and surveillance camera's all over the campus. Video footage is often used to extort money, and to sexually harass female students. And that Pakistan is home to 146 of the UN designated terrorist individuals and entities should come as no surprise either. Balochistan is not a stranger to child marriages, sexual harassment, honor killings, and motorcycles acid attacks on women, all to

descriptive of the influence of extremist groups which have no regard for human rights. With all these changes over the past few years, the Baloch are rapidly exchanging their traditional socio-cultural values, their languages, traditional knowledge systems, and even their identity to a form of religious extremism that is so unwelcome to the West.

### **Wealth**

Looking at Balochistan from a neutral point of view, one must conclude that in theory it could be one of the richest countries in the world. And at the same time, the people are numbered amongst the poorest of the poor. Pakistan is not sharing the loot with them. It exploits Balochistan's wealth of natural gas, gold, silver, copper, sulfur, and other minerals, as well as the China financed deep-sea harbor in Gwadar, on the Arabian sea, a strategic location at the mouth of the Persian Gulf. The revenue, instead, goes to Punjab, under pretext of certain [controversial](#) mega-projects, such as the [Chi-Pak Economic Corridor](#) (CPEC) as part of the renown [China Belt-and-Road Initiative](#). The whole project is actually a threat to the Baloch, who feel they own the land as original inhabitants. And the Chinese are not pleased with resisting natives.

### **Silence from the UN and the media**

Strangely enough there seems to be silence from the media and the international community. Could that be because already 42 journalists who have attempted to cover the problems in Balochistan have been murdered since 2008. It is clear that the story is not getting out much due to alleged "[National Security](#)". And yet, the work of international Human Rights organizations is dearly needed.