

**Item 6: UPR outcomes, Pakistan**

**UN Human Rights Council, 37th Session**

**19 March, 2018**

**Delivered by Mahsa Alimardani, ARTICLE 19**

Mr President,

ARTICLE 19, IFEX, and PPF observe that the adoption of the outcome of Pakistan's Universal Periodic Review comes at a time when the right to freedom of expression is under sustained and growing pressure in the country.

Under the pretext of countering terrorism, highly restrictive legislation has been introduced: broadly defined offences in the **Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act** and **Pakistan Telecommunications Act** are open to abuse, including against journalists, and must be repealed. We remain concerned that journalists, activists and ordinary citizens are being tried by military courts, under the **Anti-Terrorism Act**, for exercising their rights: these practices must cease.

Journalists continue to face serious threats to their security: more than 20 journalists and media workers have been killed since Pakistan's last UPR, and many more have suffered serious attacks including enforced disappearance, assault, acts of intimidation, and judicial harassment. Impunity for all such attacks remains pervasive. We therefore regret that the government has only "noted" several recommendations aimed at ensuring the safety of journalists are supported by the government. A draft bill on the safety of journalists, recently sent by the Senate to the government, contained serious flaws that must be addressed, making clear that the primary responsibility for preventing, protecting against, and prosecuting attacks on journalists rests with the government.

We ask the government of Pakistan whether it will include civil society organisations and the media in initiatives to legislate against attacks on journalists, as well as measures to end impunity for those attacks?

The refusal of the government to contemplate amending or repealing **blasphemy provisions**, including to end the availability of the death penalty, is deeply regrettable. As the Rabat Plan of Action makes clear, these provisions are not compatible with international human rights law. Pending cases must be dropped, and existing convictions quashed and those detained released.

The government must genuinely commit itself to promoting dialogue over censorship in their efforts to address intolerance and promote diversity, pluralism and inclusion. Senior public officials must lead by example, as recommended in HRC resolution 16/18, in speaking out against and condemning intolerance: those who challenge dominant religious ideologies must not be labelled 'terrorists' or blasphemers.

Open debate, both online and offline, must be encouraged, not criminalised or suppressed. We urge the government of Pakistan to constructively engage national and international civil society organisations to make this a reality through the implementation of its UPR recommendations.

Thank you.