

HRCP paints dismal picture of human rights

Human Rights

Dawn 2.2.05

By A Reporter

ISLAMABAD, Feb 1: A premier independent human rights body has painted a dismal picture of human rights situation in Pakistan during last year and called for government steps and people's participation in decision-making to improve it.

It also expressed concern over the deteriorating law and order situation, rise in sectarian violence and violation of basic rights by law enforcement agencies during operations in troubled areas.

The 'State of Human Rights in 2004' report compiled by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) was launched before an audience comprising representatives of civil society, NGO and media here on Tuesday.

The 6-chapter report includes HRCP surveys, fact finding reports, communications with its correspondents and private citizens, official gazettes, economic and legal documents besides other public statements.

HRCP Director I.A.Rehman, Chairman Tahir Mohammad Khan, former chairman Afrasyab Khattak and member Nasreen Azhar were the guest speakers, who informed that 2004 had witnessed more human rights violations than previous years.

The HRCP chairman said the report questioned quality of legislation, functioning of judiciary, deteriorating law and order situation, security of human life and property.

The report also discusses poor conditions of prisons, problems of prisoners languishing in jails for many years and awaiting their cases to be decided. It also reveals consequences of political parties who are threats to freedom and human right movements.

He said the report highlighted how religion, misinterpreted by extremists, was a restraint to development. It was a problem for those who disagreed with their fanatical ideas.

The report shows concern over ram-

nant violation of rights of women and children.

"Education standards have deteriorated. It is expensive and inaccessible to the poor. Pakistan may have beautiful cities but people face serious housing problems. Katchi abadi residents are continuously denied basic living necessities. These and many such questions are discussed in the report", said Mr Khan.

Sketching a horrific picture of year 2004, Mr Rehman said, "2004 has seen some of the worst incidents of sectarian violence."

Apprehensive of more state violence in future, Mr Rehman said, "the degree of freedom with which the state used its guns on its own people was alarming. Military operations as first option to solve problems and decline in guarantee of protection for basic rights were matters of grave concern."

In the absence of security of law and justice, anybody declared terrorist had

no access to legal representation and detained secretly before handing the so called terrorist to foreign agencies, Mr Rehman said.

He said the report painted a gloomy picture of progress of legislation that was always designed in the interest of State rather than in the interest of democratic growth. "People are denied participation decision making processes that affect their lives. People are helpless before the State and the degree of anger and protest in their voices when reacting to human rights violations have lessened."

As an humanitarian organization, HRCP, he said, was concerned over the increase in despair of people, leading to increase in number of suicide cases.

"People are taking their own lives being unable to meet their requirements. The economy is said to be improving with its benefits not reaching people who continue to suffer. In the wake of these problems, we as peo-

nts situation in 2004

ple need to reaffirm our commitment to fundamental rights and ensure peace and harmony in the country", he said.

Former HRCP chairman Mr Khattak expressed his concern over use of force in Wana and Balochistan which he asserted was not the solution to handle complex matters and was alienating the people of these areas.

"Lack of access to media in areas of armed conflict is a serious problem and humanitarian aid organizations are being denied access into conflict hit zones."

He said reforms in Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) had failed to be implemented. "The government of FATA started its work with high rhetorics but has failed to deliver. Military has gone into FATA but not the Supreme Court or the High Court. The government is wriggling out of its commitment of reforms."

Mr Khattak also pointed out lack of

establishment's commitment to ensure child rights and that of women. "Children as young as 3 years have been convicted under the Frontier Crimes Regulations and are serving their sentences in Haripur."

Informing about the plight of Pakistani detainees in Afghan jails, Mr Khattak informed, "The Afghan government wants to hand them over to Pakistan so that their cases can be heard and their fates decided. However, Pakistan has refused to accept them. The exact figure is not known but there are some 300 to 400 Pakistan national prisoners languishing in jails in Afghanistan for over 3 years. This does not include Pakistanis detained by Afghan warlords."

Speakers condemned military operation in Balochistan that was now resulted in migration of over 1000 people leaving Sui and settling in safer areas.