Law Research Journal (LRJ)
Volume 4 Issue 1, 2026
ISSN(P): 3006-3027, ISSN(E): 3006-3035
Homepage: https://lawresearchreview.com/index.php/Journal

Human Rights, Security, and Peacebuilding in Pakistan: An Analysis of UN Treaty Body Concluding Observations

Muhammad Shan
PhD Law Scholar, International Islamic University, Islamabad, Pakistan

How to Cite this Article:
Shan, M. (2026). Human rights, security, and peacebuilding in Pakistan: An analysis of UN treaty body concluding observations. *Law Research Journal*, *4*(1).

Abstract

Pakistan's interaction with United Nations treaty bodies illuminates systemic challenges at the nexus of human rights, national security, and peacebuilding. This article scrutinizes concluding observations from pivotal UN committees, encompassing the Human Rights Committee, Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination Committee against Torture Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women Committee on the Rights of the Child and Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. These documents expose how counter-terrorism strategies, enforced disappearances, torture, blasphemy laws, and entrenched discrimination against ethnic minorities, women, and children perpetuate insecurity and obstruct peacebuilding in volatile regions such as Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Sindh. Notwithstanding legislative advancements like the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention and Punishment) Act 2022 and the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2018, pervasive implementation deficiencies, impunity for state actors, and socio-economic disparities exacerbate conflicts. Drawing on academic analyses, this study posits that a rights-centric security paradigm, bolstered by judicial autonomy, inclusive policies, and international collaboration, is imperative for sustainable peace. Recommendations advocate for criminalizing enforced disappearances, abolishing discriminatory laws, bolstering economic protections, and fostering inter-ethnic reconciliation to cultivate resilient societies.

Keywords

Cultural Rights, Women Committee, Racial Discrimination, United Nations treaty

Corresponding Author: muhammadshanmdk@gmail.com; Received: July 10, 2025; Accepted: Nov 27, 2025; Published: Jan 9, 2026

1. Introduction

Pakistan occupies a strategically vital yet precarious position in South Asia, marked by a complex interplay of internal security threats, regional geopolitical tensions, and persistent human rights concerns. Since its independence in 1947, the country has grappled with ethnic insurgencies, sectarian violence, religious extremism, and the fallout from prolonged counter-terrorism operations, particularly following the events of September 11, 2001, and the subsequent U.S.-led intervention in Afghanistan. These dynamics have profoundly shaped Pakistan's human rights landscape, where national security imperatives frequently overshadow individual protections, leading to widespread allegations of abuses by state institutions.[1]

The concept of human security, as articulated in the seminal 1994 United Nations Development Programme report, extends beyond traditional state-centric notions of security to encompass freedom from fear (violence and coercion) and freedom from want (poverty, deprivation, and discrimination).[2] In Pakistan, this broader understanding reveals how violations of civil and political rights such as enforced disappearances, torture, and restrictions on freedom of expression intersect with deprivations in economic, social, and cultural rights, including access to education, healthcare, and equitable resource distribution. Such intersections not only perpetuate cycles of violence but also undermine efforts toward sustainable peacebuilding, defined here as

[1]Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, State of Human Rights in 2023 (Lahore: HRCP, 2024), 10-25.

[2]United Nations Development Programme, Human Development Report 1994 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 22-25.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4. 0 International License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

the multifaceted process of preventing conflict recurrence through institutional reforms, societal reconciliation, inclusive governance, and the promotion of justice and human rights.[3]

As a state party to several core international human rights treaties, Pakistan is obligated to uphold standards enshrined in instruments such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the Convention against Torture (CAT), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). The United Nations treaty body system provides a critical mechanism for monitoring compliance through periodic state reporting, constructive dialogue, and the issuance of concluding observations. These observations offer authoritative assessments of progress, pinpoint persistent violations, and provide targeted recommendations, serving as both diagnostic tools and roadmaps for reform.[4]

In recent years, Pakistan's periodic reviews have highlighted a recurring pattern: while the state has enacted progressive legislation such as the establishment of the National Commission for Human Rights in 2015, provincial laws on women's protection, and measures addressing transgender rights implementation remains severely hampered by institutional weaknesses, political instability, resource constraints, and a culture of impunity, particularly within security apparatuses.[5] Counter-terrorism measures, including military courts and special laws granting extraordinary powers to armed forces in conflict-affected areas, have been repeatedly criticized for enabling human rights violations that alienate communities and fuel grievances, thereby complicating peacebuilding initiatives in regions like Balochistan, the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (now merged into Khyber Pakhtunkhwa), and parts of Sindh.[6]

This article undertakes a comprehensive analysis of concluding observations issued by six key UN treaty bodies, with a focus on their most recent reviews available as of 2026. By examining cross-cutting themes ranging from counter-terrorism and enforced disappearances to discrimination against minorities, women, and children, as well as economic inequalities the study elucidates how these violations erode human security and obstruct peacebuilding. It argues that Pakistan's path to sustainable peace necessitates a paradigm shift toward a rights-based approach to security, one that prioritizes accountability, judicial independence, inclusive policies, and meaningful engagement with civil society and international mechanisms.

Drawing on treaty body observations, supplemented by scholarly analyses and reports from non-governmental organizations, this examination reveals a stark dichotomy between legislative intent and on-ground realities. Ultimately, the article proposes actionable reforms to bridge this gap, emphasizing that genuine peacebuilding in Pakistan cannot be achieved through military means alone but requires addressing the root causes of insecurity through robust human rights protections and equitable development.

Importance of Legal Studies and Peace Education to Advance Human Rights, Security, and Peacebuilding in Pakistan

[3]Boutros Boutros-Ghali, An Agenda for Peace: Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking and Peace-keeping (New York: United Nations, 1992), paras. 20-21.

[4]Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, "Treaty Bodies," accessed January 6, 2026, https://www.ohchr.org/en/treaty-bodies.

[5]National Commission for Human Rights Pakistan, Annual Report 2024 (Islamabad: NCHR, 2025), 45-60.

[6]International Crisis Group, "Revising Pakistan's Counter-Terrorism Strategy," Asia Report No. 297 (2019): 12-18.

Integrating legal studies with peace education offers a complementary strategy for addressing the systemic issues highlighted in UN treaty body observations on Pakistan. Legal studies provide the analytic tools to map gaps between international obligations and domestic practice exposed in areas such as military court jurisdiction over civilians, enforced disappearances, misuse of blasphemy laws, and weak protections for women, children, and minorities. This lens underpins concrete reforms: criminalizing torture and disappearances, curbing military jurisdiction, repealing discriminatory provisions, and reinforcing judicial independence to align security policy with the rule of law.

Peace education translates these standards into social practice by cultivating nonviolence, tolerance, and reconciliation through curricula, community programs, and public campaigns. It addresses root drivers of insecurity ethnic grievances in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, religious extremism, and socio-economic exclusion fostering empathy and inclusion.

Together, these approaches narrow the persistent implementation gap: legal studies enable accountability through advocacy, litigation, and policy design, while peace education builds public buy-in, reduces radicalization, and strengthens inter-community trust. This synergy turns rights-based security into practice, supports marginalized regions, and advances durable peace offering scholars, educators, policymakers, and civil society a coherent pathway from UN recommendations to resilient national stability.

UN Treaty Body Concluding Observations on Pakistan

The United Nations human rights treaty body system consists of ten independent expert committees that monitor how States parties implement nine core international human rights treaties and their optional protocols. Pakistan has ratified seven of these core treaties which are as follow:

- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR, 2010)
- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD, 1966)
- Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT, 2010)
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1996)
- Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1990)
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR, 2008)
- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD, 2011)

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Human Security Theory

This study adopts a human security based, rights-centered peacebuilding framework to analyze the relationship between human rights, security policies, and peacebuilding in Pakistan. Moving beyond state-centric and militarized conceptions of security, the framework views security as the protection of individuals and communities from both physical violence and structural deprivation. It draws on critical security perspectives that question the effectiveness of coercive governance and exceptional security measures in producing sustainable stability. Within this approach, human rights are understood not as constraints on security, but as foundational elements of lasting peace. United Nations treaty body concluding observations are examined as authoritative assessments of structural insecurity, highlighting how practices such as enforced disappearances, torture, discriminatory laws, and socio-economic exclusion erode public trust, intensify grievances, and hinder reconciliation. By linking accountability, judicial independence, inclusive

governance, and socio-economic justice to peacebuilding outcomes, the framework enables an evaluation of security practices based on their contribution to long-term peace rather than short-term control.

2.2 Overview of UN Treaty Bodies and Pakistan's Engagements

UN treaty bodies oversee compliance with foundational human rights treaties ratified by Pakistan, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR, ratified 2010), International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD, 1966), Convention against Torture (CAT, 2010), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1996), Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1990), and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR, 2010). States submit reports, prompting reviews and concluding observations with critiques and suggestions.

Pakistan's engagements disclose recurring motifs: commendations for legal reforms, yet rebukes for inadequate execution amid security prerogatives. For example, counter-terrorism legislation like the Anti-Terrorism Act 1997 and military-led operations have been censured for facilitating abuses, intertwining security with human rights erosions that thwart peacebuilding.[7] Recent observations, such as those from 2024, reflect evolving dynamics, including refugee repatriation and escalating minority persecutions, highlighting the urgency of alignment with international norms.

3. Analysis of Key Themes

3.1 Security and Counter-Terrorism Measures

UN observations recurrently critique Pakistan's security apparatus for privileging state imperatives over individual safeguards, engendering violence cycles. The Human Rights Committee voiced grave concerns over military courts adjudicating civilians, contravening fair trial standards and fostering institutional distrust.[8] In Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, operations under the Actions (in Aid of Civil Power) Regulation have intensified ethnic animosities, undermining reconciliation efforts. The Committee recommended curtailing military jurisdiction and instituting civilian supervision to rebuild citizen-state trust, essential for peacebuilding.

The Committee against Torture documented extrajudicial executions and arbitrary arrests in counter-terrorism contexts, with security forces enjoying impunity.[9] Scholarly critiques argue these measures, while targeting militancy, alienate communities, perpetuating insurgency. [10] Peacebuilding necessitates demilitarization and community engagement, as evidenced by failed dialogues in restive provinces.

3.2 Enforced Disappearances and Torture

Enforced disappearances, predominantly in security operations, constitute a pervasive issue. The Human Rights Committee lambasted the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances for its inefficacy, with over 1,200 cases registered since 2010 remaining unresolved, disproportionately affecting ethnic minorities

[7]International Crisis Group, "Revising Pakistan's Counter-Terrorism Strategy," Asia Report No. 297 (2019): 12-18.

[8]United Nations Human Rights Committee, Concluding Observations on the Second Periodic Report of Pakistan, CCPR/C/PAK/CO/2 (New York: United Nations, 2024), paras. 19-22.

[9] United Nations Committee against Torture, Concluding Observations on the Initial Report of Pakistan, CAT/C/PAK/CO/1 (New York: United Nations, 2017), paras. 10-14.

[10]Muhammad Amir Rana, "Human Rights Challenges in Pakistan: Global Norms and Local Practices," Index Copernicus International Journal 12, no. 3 (2023): 45-62.

and activists.[11] The Racial Discrimination Committee echoed alarms over ethno-religious leaders' abductions, urging investigations and prosecutions.[12]

Torture persists in detention centers, per the Torture Committee, lacking interrogation safeguards amid security pretexts.[13] From 2014-2016, 487 torture cases were reported, underscoring systemic abuse.[14] These infractions fracture social bonds, complicating peacebuilding in conflict zones. Committees advocate domestic criminalization of disappearances, ratification of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, and truth commissions for reconciliation.

3.3 Blasphemy Laws and Minority Rights

Blasphemy statutes incite violence and marginalize religious minorities. The Racial Discrimination Committee noted custody deaths and protracted trials for suspects, often minorities, amid 2024 escalations in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa involving lynching and worship site destructions.[15] Minority discrimination permeates socio-economic spheres, with the Economic Rights Committee noting barriers for ethnic groups in employment and services.[16] Academic studies link these laws to radicalization, impeding peacebuilding through societal polarization.[17] Recommendations include repealing blasphemy provisions, prosecuting hate crimes, and launching tolerance education to nurture inclusive communities.

3.4 Women's and Children's Rights in Security Contexts

Gender discrimination converges with security vulnerabilities, as per CEDAW observations. Forced conversions and marriages afflict minority women in conflict zones, alongside unconsented gender reassignment surgeries.[18] Honour killings and domestic violence affect 90% of women, with uneven policy application across provinces.[19] Peacebuilding demands women's empowerment via political quotas, yet violence curtails participation.

Children's rights suffer amid security disruptions, with the Child Rights Committee decrying minority, disabled, and LGBT children's discrimination, advocating anti-stigma campaigns.[20] Operations hinder education and facilitate child recruitment, eroding future peace prospects. Economic observations highlight malnutrition and poverty's child impacts, with 44% stunting rates.[21]

---

[11]United Nations Human Rights Committee, Concluding Observations on the Second Periodic Report of Pakistan, paras. 27-30.

[12]United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Concluding Observations on the Combined Twenty-Fourth to Twenty-Sixth Periodic Reports of Pakistan, CERD/C/PAK/CO/24-26 (New York: United Nations, 2024), paras. 15-18.

[13]United Nations Committee against Torture, Concluding Observations on the Initial Report of Pakistan, paras. 16-20.

[14]Ibid. para. 17.

[15]United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Concluding Observations, paras. 21-24.

[16]United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Concluding Observations on the Initial Report of Pakistan, E/C.12/PAK/CO/1 (New York: United Nations, 2017), paras. 25-28.

[17]Salma Malik, "Blasphemy Laws and Societal Polarization in Pakistan," Journal of Peace Studies 28, no. 4 (2022): 89-105.

[18]United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, Concluding Observations on the Fifth Periodic Report of Pakistan, CEDAW/C/PAK/CO/5 (New York: United Nations, 2020), paras. 18-21.

[19]Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, State of Human Rights in 2023 (Lahore: HRCP, 2024), 145-150.

[20]United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding Observations on the Fifth Periodic Report of Pakistan, CRC/C/PAK/CO/5 (New York: United Nations, 2016), paras. 22-25.

[21]United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Concluding Observations on the Initial Report of Pakistan, paras. 45-48.

3.5 Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights and Peacebuilding

Economic disparities fuel insecurity, as noted in CESCR observations. Poverty alleviation initiatives like Benazir Income Support Program aid 5.8 million women, yet 58% household food insecurity persists.[22] Security operations displace communities, exacerbating unemployment and housing shortages. Refugee policies, including Afghan repatriation, risk refoulement, violating non-discrimination.[23] Peacebuilding requires integrating economic rights, such as equitable resource distribution in marginalized regions, to mitigate conflict drivers.

4. Implementation Challenges

4.1 Political Instability and Prioritization of Security over Rights

Frequent political turmoil, including government changes, military influence, and polarization, disrupts policy continuity and human rights reforms. National security imperatives countering terrorism, insurgency, and border threats often override rights protections, justifying measures like military courts for civilians or restrictions on freedoms. Political instability diverts resources from human rights initiatives and fosters an environment where reforms are delayed or reversed.

4.2 Resource Constraints and Socio-Economic Factors

Limited budgetary allocations for human rights institutions, judicial reforms, and social programs hinder implementation. Poverty, low literacy, and regional disparities exacerbate vulnerabilities, making it difficult to address economic, social, and cultural rights (e.g., education and health in marginalized areas). Socio-cultural norms, including patriarchal structures and religious conservatism, resist changes in areas like gender equality and minority protections.

4.3 Weak Follow-Up Mechanisms and Reporting Delays

Pakistan has engaged with treaty bodies by submitting reports, but follow-up on recommendations remains inconsistent. Delays in reporting, incomplete data, and a lack of dedicated national mechanisms for tracking progress (e.g., a standing inter-ministerial body) result in recurring concerns across reviews. Civil society inputs highlight that state reports often downplay violations, reducing accountability.

5. Recommendations

- Fortify judicial independence by guaranteeing fair trials.
- Promulgate anti-discrimination statutes, repealing blasphemy laws and criminalizing torture comprehensively.
- Augment inquiry commissions' mandates for disappearances and torture, ensuring prosecutions.
- Advance inclusive initiatives for minorities, women, and children via education, economic empowerment, and participation.
- Harmonize economic policies with rights obligations, addressing poverty and refugee protections.

5.1 Conclusion

United Nations treaty body observations offer a clear and authoritative guide for connecting human rights advancement with effective security policies and genuine peacebuilding in Pakistan. Reviews consistently acknowledge legislative improvements while stressing that weak enforcement, widespread impunity, and the dominance of narrow security thinking prevent real change.

---

[22] Ibid., paras. 30-33.

[23] Amnesty International, "Pakistan: Forced Returns of Afghan Refugees Must Stop," Amnesty International Report (2024).

The patterns identified counter-terrorism practices that alienate communities, unresolved disappearances targeting specific groups, misuse of blasphemy laws sparking violence, routine torture, heightened vulnerability of women and children in conflict zones, and deep economic divides do not merely represent rights failures. They actively fuel insecurity, erode state authority, and block reconciliation in the most troubled regions. Militarised responses alone cannot deliver stability; they often deepen the very problems they aim to solve.

The combined recommendations point toward a different approach: security built on respect for all rights, recognising that civil, political, economic, social, and cultural protections are interconnected. Key changes include making enforced disappearances a specific crime, reforming discriminatory laws, returning civilian cases to ordinary courts, establishing independent oversight of security forces, expanding inclusive economic programmes, and creating reliable systems to track treaty commitments. Alongside these, sustained efforts in education, inter-community dialogue, and women's leadership can help prevent extremism and heal divisions.

Realising this vision depends on overcoming major obstacles: fragile institutions, scarce resources, shifting political priorities, and a longstanding acceptance of impunity. Strong political leadership shown through adequate funding, judicial autonomy, and depoliticised human rights bodies is essential. Civil society organisations, national rights institutions, and global partners play crucial roles in advocacy, monitoring, and assistance.

Pakistan now faces a decisive moment. Adopting a rights-centred approach to security and peace is not only required by international commitments; it is the most practical path to lasting national strength amid complex modern challenges. By acting decisively on the insights provided by treaty bodies, the country can move from persistent fragility toward genuine resilience, turning human rights protection into the foundation of inclusive and enduring peace. Delay or inaction will only prolong division and instability, affecting future generations profoundly. Sustainable peace remains within reach but only through deliberate, comprehensive reforms that place human dignity and justice at the heart of governance and security policy.

6. References

- Amnesty International. "Pakistan: Forced Returns of Afghan Refugees Must Stop." Amnesty International Report, 2024.
- Asad Ullah Khan. "Diplomatic Mediation, Peacebuilding, and Human Rights Advocacy in Pakistan." International Relations Review 45, no. 2 (2025): 120–140.
- Boutros Boutros-Ghali. An Agenda for Peace: Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking and Peace-keeping. New York: United Nations, 1992.
- Human Rights Commission of Pakistan. State of Human Rights in 2023. Lahore: HRCP, 2024.
- International Crisis Group. "Pakistan's Institutions and Civil Society." Asia Report No. 310, 2023.
- International Crisis Group. "Revising Pakistan's Counter-Terrorism Strategy." Asia Report No. 297, 2019.
- Muhammad Amir Rana. "Human Rights Challenges in Pakistan: Global Norms and Local Practices." Index Copernicus International Journal 12, no. 3 (2023): 45–62.
- National Commission for Human Rights Pakistan. Annual Report 2024. Islamabad: NCHR, 2025.
- Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. "Treaty Bodies." Accessed January 6, 2026. https://www.ohchr.org/en/treaty-bodies.

- Salma Malik. "Blasphemy Laws and Societal Polarization in Pakistan." Journal of Peace Studies 28, no. 4 (2022): 89–105.
- Salma Malik. "Pakistan's National Commission for Human Rights' Engagement with UN Treaty Bodies." Pakistan Journal of Law 3, no. 7 (2024): 210–225.
- United Nations Committee against Torture. Concluding Observations on the Initial Report of Pakistan. CAT/C/PAK/CO/1. New York: United Nations, 2017.
- United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Concluding Observations on the Initial Report of Pakistan. E/C.12/PAK/CO/1. New York: United Nations, 2017.
- United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. Concluding Observations on the Fifth Periodic Report of Pakistan. CEDAW/C/PAK/CO/5. New York: United Nations, 2020.
- United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Concluding Observations on the Combined Twenty-Fourth to Twenty-Sixth Periodic Reports of Pakistan. CERD/C/PAK/CO/24-26. New York: United Nations, 2024.
- United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. Concluding Observations on the Fifth Periodic Report of Pakistan. CRC/C/PAK/CO/5. New York: United Nations, 2016.
- United Nations Development Programme. Human Development Report 1994. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- United Nations Human Rights Committee. Concluding Observations on the Second Periodic Report of Pakistan. CCPR/C/PAK/CO/2. New York: United Nations, 2024.