

'Illegal and primitive': Pakistan expels foreign aid groups in droves

Friday 22 December 2017, by [BAQI Nashrah](#), [JANJUA Haroon](#) (Date first published: 18 December 2017).

Warnings of negative impact on ordinary people and damage to Pakistan's international standing as 29 organisations are given two months to leave.

The Pakistani government has ordered a number of foreign charities and rights groups to close down their operations and leave the country by the end of January.

Over the past few days, the interior ministry has sent letters to 29 major international non-government organisations (INGOs), including Action Aid and Marie Stopes, telling them to shut their offices and leave within 60 days *[see article below]*.

Pakistan has toughened its stance towards local and foreign aid groups in recent years by announcing a strict registration policy for organisations to operate and raise funds in the country [\[1\]](#). The move followed numerous allegations linking charitable work to espionage and anti-government activities.

Two years ago, Pakistan shut down Save the Children's offices in the capital [\[2\]](#), Islamabad, accusing the charity of involvement in the CIA operation to capture Osama bin Laden, the late al-Qaida leader. Last month, the last of three medical facilities run by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) in tribal areas bordering Afghanistan was forcibly closed down.

The latest move has triggered a scramble for clarification among international organisations in the country, according to Saba Khattak, executive director of the Open Society Foundations Pakistan office. "We obviously find what has happened both disappointing and surprising," said Khattak.

The interior ministry spokesperson, Yasir Shakeel, said organisations that have been denied registration have the right to appeal within 90 days.

"Interior minister Ahsan Iqbal has directed that there should be no hurdles for authentic INGOs who are playing an important role in the development sector," said Shakeel. "However, all INGOs operating in Pakistan should respect the laws of the country."

One Action Aid official, who did not want to be named, said: "Closing down all the projects in 60 days is impossible. We want to know on what basis the government is asking us to shut down our offices.

"The issue of concern here is the employment of our hundreds of workers in Pakistan. Our organisation is serving the people of Pakistan and [is] not involved in disrespecting Pakistan."

Mohammad Tahseen, of the Pakistan Civil Society Forum, said: "It is an illegal and a primitive way to expel INGOs from Pakistan.

“The majority of these INGOs are operating jointly with local groups and organisations and government should take us [local staff] on board about the security reasons, if there are any espionage issues. This act of government will portray a negative image of Pakistan globally.”

Brad Adams, Asia director of Human Rights Watch, also criticised the decision. He said: “The Pakistani government’s closure of international organisations without allowing these decisions to be contested shows disturbing disregard for the wellbeing of ordinary Pakistanis who benefit from them.”

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* The Guardian. Mon 18 Dec '17 17.29 GMT Last modified on Mon 18 Dec '17 17.33 GMT:

<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2017/dec/18/illegal-primitive-pakistan-expels-29-foreign-aid-groups>

Pakistan orders 29 INGOs to leave country within 60 days

KARACHI: Pakistan has ordered at least 29 international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) to leave the country.

The interior ministry has recently written to 29 INGOs – including ActionAid, Plan International and Marie Stopes – to warn them about their applications to continue working in the country being rescinded and that they are to leave within 60 days. None has been given a reason, *Financial Times* reported.

Speaking to *The Express Tribune*, Country Director ActionAid Iftikhar A Nizami said that 60 days to wrap up multiple projects is a short time.

ActionAid has always complied by the government’s orders and they have accepted this decision too, he said, adding, “But the organisation questions what particularly went wrong that led to them being asked to shut down the operation without any clarification.”

Referring to the shift in prior policies, Iftikhar noted that the organisation has been working diligently since 1990 and has followed through the change from Economic Affairs Division to Ministry of Interior as per government’s disposition.

Authorities order George Soros foundation, other aid groups to close

“ActionAid was asked to submit various papers and documents throughout the process from 2013 to 2014 in the light of new policies and we always complied,” he added.

The letter of expulsion was received on December 5 by ActionAid and the date of dispatching was November 27.

What leaves the country director unsettled is the fact that over 50 workers will be severely affected by this decision.

“We have always tried to serve the people of Pakistan, we were given accolades during the catastrophic earthquake of 2005 and wouldn’t do anything to hamper the image of the nation,” he said.

International trusts had been working in the country after signing “open-ended agreements” but in November 2013 the government introduced a new policy to streamline the functioning of INGOs in the country.

Around 150 NGOs, a majority of them international, had submitted relevant registration documents with the Economic Affairs Division (EAD) by early 2014.

In 2014, former interior minister Chaudhry Nisar had unveiled a policy for international NGOs, wherein they would require the government’s consent to gather funds and operate. “NGOs working against Pakistan’s strategic, security, economic or other interests will have their registration cancelled,” he said, adding that any organisation restrained from working will have the right to appeal,” he was quoted as saying.

Nisar previously shared his concerns over the international NGOs being funded by India and Israel, saying the activities of these organisations have been monitored for long and the decision of expulsion was followed by the hunch that they were doing something which was against ‘Pakistan’s interest’.

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* THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE. PAKISTAN. Published: December 14, 2017:

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/1583668/1-pakistan-orders-29-foreign-ngos-leave-country-within-60-days/>

Footnotes

[1] <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2015/oct/15/ngo-alert-international-organisations-in-pakistan-under-greater-scrutiny>

[2] <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jun/12/pakistan-shuts-down-save-the-children-offices-in-islamabad>