Minorities Under Siege: Pakistan’s Bloody Campaign to Impose the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor

3 October 2016

While gross human rights violations remain the order of the day in China and Pakistan, it is not surprising that a US$46-billion mega project is encountering fierce opposition on part of the populations whose homelands will be cut through and dispossessed by the project. Supposed to take the economic relationship between Beijing and Islamabad to new heights, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is already severely impacting the livelihoods of millions of people who neither have been granted a say in the official discussions to implement the project nor will eventually benefit from its development. Even more concerning, Pakistani security agencies are brutally cracking down on peaceful resistance against CPEC and violently silencing anyone who dares critiquing the project.

Pakistan-occupied Gilgit-Baltistan suffers for being the gateway to CPEC. Despite being a UN declared disputed territory, a collection of major constructions – including mega-dams and gas pipelines - will cut through the entire territory and affect the lives of 400,000 indigenous inhabitants and at least 200km2 of natural environment and cultural heritage sites. The most pressing issue for the region is the so-called Bhasha-Diamer dam. When concluded, it will have inundated cultural heritages such as carvings and edicts, as well as destroyed 32 villages and displaced more than 25,000 people.

At the same time, Balochistan, and Beijing’s geopolitical consideration for the region has been pivotal to the design of CPEC. Pakistan’s most impoverished province is home to the port of Gwadar, the key reason behind the construction of 2,000km of road and rail infrastructure to eventually connect the deep-sea port with China’s largest province, Xinjiang – home to China’s oppressed Uyghurs. The indigenous populations of resource-rich Sindh province likewise fear that CPEC will intensify the ongoing onslaught of Sindhi political activists by Pakistan’s security agencies and the appropriation of the region’s natural resources.

In light of this precarious situation facing our members in Balochistan, Sindh and Gilgit-Baltistan, UNPO spent the month of September increasing its efforts to raise awareness of the human rights abuses committed by Pakistan: During the 33rd Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva, UNPO convened two side-events to shed light on the escalation of abductions, harassment, torture and arbitrary executions committed by Pakistan’s security forces. Both events took place in the context of the release of a report by the UN Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances’ (WGEID), to which UNPO’s contribution was highly taken into account, and of the UNPO report “Faces of Oppression: Human Rights Violations in Balochistan”. Despite the fact that the rule of law in Pakistan remains dismal and that the road to hold perpetrators accountable to their crimes might be a long one, international awareness of the atrocities committed by Pakistan has reached a new dimension. Thanks to the relentless efforts of UNPO and organisations representing Pakistan’s oppressed regions and occupied territories, there is a growing perception among democratic States that stopping Islamabad’s bloody strategy which has cost the lives of thousands of innocent people can no longer wait.
III. UNREPRESENTED DIPLOMATS WORKSHOP IN BRUSSELS

8-9 September 2016

UNPO in collaboration with Dr Fiona McConnell (University of Oxford) and Tibet Justice Center organised a workshop entitled “Performing as a Diplomat”, which took place in Brussels, Belgium, on 8-9 September 2016. This interactive workshop was the last out of three in the project “Training diplomats from unrepresented nations: capacity building for effective UN lobbying”, funded by the University of Oxford’s ESRC Impact Acceleration Account. Participants from 21 different unrepresented nations, guided by a team of trainers and facilitators, discussed the role of the EU as a forum for human rights advocacy, as well as how to combine it with advocacy at the UN level. Read more here.

UNHRC SIDE-EVENT DISCUSSES ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES AND CPEC, GENEVA

19 September 2016

On the occasion of the 33rd Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva, UNPO co-organised a side-event with the Nonviolent Radical Party entitled “Never to Be Seen Again: Enforced Disappearances and Pakistan’s Bloody Campaign to Impose CPEC in Balochistan”. The successful international conference took place only days after the release of the annual report of the UN Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances’ (WG Eid) and brought together high-level international speakers to debate about ongoing human rights abuses in Balochistan and its structural causes. To read more about this event click here.

ILHAM TOHTI AND MUSTAFA DZHEMILEV NOMINATED FOR 2016 SAKHAROV PRIZE FOR FREEDOM OF THOUGHT

UNPO formally launched the campaign for Toht’s nomination during a conference in May 2016, supported by Ilhan Kyuchyuk MEP (ALDE). For the first time in several years, a candidate supported by over 40 individual MEPs from across the political spectrum and EU Member States was nominated independently from the candidates put forth by the political groups - thanks to the joint efforts of the aforementioned advocacy groups and supportive MEPs. This year, another UNPO Member, Mustafa Dzhemilev, the historic leader of the Crimean Tatars, was also nominated for the Sakharov Prize, confirming that the work of UNPO and the struggles of its Members remain more relevant than ever. Read more here.

UNHRC SIDE-EVENT ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN PAKISTAN, GENEVA

20 September 2016

UNPO joined forces with the Asian Legal Resource Centre and the Right Livelihood Award Foundation in another side-event addressing in particular the systematic killings of lawyers and the appalling human rights situation in Pakistan’s oppressed regions. Key speakers representing Pakistan’s suppressed peoples and occupied territories included Mirza Wahajat Hassan, exiled Chairman of Gilgit-Baltistan and Mr Lakhumal Luhana of the World Sindhi Congress. Discussions focussed on Pakistan’s deteriorating human rights record, and what can be done to rectify this. To read more about the event click here.

PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION ON BUSINESS AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN ETHIOPIA

September 2016

UNPO cooperated with Ilhan Kyuchyuk MEP (ALDE), on submitting a parliamentary question to the European Commission inquiring about the Commission’s perspective on the human rights implications of foreign investment and business operations in the Ogaden region of Ethiopia. The Ethiopian government has been forcefully depopulating land to action it to multinational companies for oil exploration, tragically making killings, rape and confiscation of livestock a common occurrence in the region.
FACT-FINDING MISSION TO WESTERN THRACE
19-22 September 2016
UNPO partook in a four-day fact-finding mission organised by the Federation of Western Thrace Turks in Europe (ABTTF) to assess the situation of the ethnic Turkish minority in Greece. The mission also included delegates from Centre Mauritius Coppieters (CMC), the Greek Helsinki Monitor and Members of the European Parliament Nils Torvalds (ALDE, Finland) and Pál Csáky (EPP, Slovakia). The mission confirmed that the situation of ethnic Turks in Greece is increasingly worrying and requires urgent attention, especially with regards to freedom of association and freedom of belief. A comprehensive report on the findings and recommendations of the mission will be presented to Greek and European institutions in early 2017. To read more about the mission, click here.

UNPO ADVOCACY VISIT TO WASHINGTON DC
26-30 September 2016
Mr Nasser Boladai, President of the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO) and Spokesperson for the Balochistan’s Peoples Party, together with Mr Marvin Kumatet, US Program Coordinator at UNPO, held a round of advocacy meetings in Washington DC to raise awareness of the human rights situation in the Iranian and Pakistani parts of Balochistan. The delegation also made further headway towards the establishment of Baloch language broadcasting with Voice of America, underlining in discussions with policymakers on the Hill the urgent need to counter state-sponsored media in both Iran in Pakistan which are dominated by religious sectarian narratives and are often violent in content.

IRA-Mauritania in Belgium protest outside the Mauritanian Embassy
28 September 2016
Members of the Haratin community and supporters of the fight against slavery met outside the Mauritanian Embassy in Brussels to protest the imprisonment of 13 anti-slavery activists of IRA-Mauritania and call for their release. The protest was organised by IRA-Mauritania, supported by Amnesty International and the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO), and covered by several journalists. Read more about the protest here. For the latest developments on the anti-slavery movement in Mauritania, click here.

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT CONFERENCE ON PLAGUE OF ASSYRIAN WOMEN
29 September 2016
UNPO, in collaboration with the Assyrian Women’s Federation of Sweden and Kati Pirsi MEP (S&D, Netherlands), held a conference entitled ‘Vulnerability and Empowerment of Women and Children in Armed Conflict’ at the European Parliament in Brussels. Bringing together Assyrian women from Sweden, Belgium, Turkey, the Netherlands, Syria, Iraq and Germany, the conference discussed various challenges faced by Assyrian women and children in conflict zones and highlighted the urgent need for international action to end their suffering. The conference was followed by a demonstration in front of the European Parliament on 30 September, to call on the EU to take affirmative action for the protection of Assyrian women and children in war-torn regions. Read more here.

UNPO CONTRIBUTES TO UN REPORT ON ENFORCED AND INVOLUNTARY DISAPPEARANCES
12 September 2016
On 12 September 2016, the UN WGEID (Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances) transmitted a follow-up to a previous report to the UN Human Rights Council, which consisted of recommendations and information regarding the status of enforced and involuntary disappearances in Pakistan following their mission in 2012. The report includes 23 references to UNPO’s recommendations, information and expertise regarding the situation of the Baloch and Sindhi people. Read more here.

UNPO SUBMITS REPORTS FOR UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW ON INDONESIA AND BRAZIL
22 September 2016
UNPO submitted two reports to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights ahead of its 27th Universal Periodic Review (UPR) Session scheduled to take place in April 2017. During this upcoming session, the Republic of Indonesia and the Federative Republic of Brazil will be under consideration for their 3rd UPR Cycle. UNPO’s reports call attention to human rights violations occurring in both countries, with an emphasis on the situation of the Acehnese and West Papuan communities in Indonesia and on indigenous peoples in Brazil.

Read more here.

Click here for the report on Indonesia, and here for the report on Brazil.

CONFERENCE REPORT “FACES OF OPPRESSION: HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN BALOCHISTAN”
19 September 2016
Against the backdrop of the release of the WGEID’s annual report, UNPO released its report on a side-event hosted on the occasion of the 31st Session of the UN Human Rights Council in March 2016. The report contains the transcripts of all speeches delivered at the event entitled ‘Faces of Oppression: Human Rights Violations in Balochistan’, as well as the speakers’ biographies. Read more and access the report here.
EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT CONFERENCE ON ILHAM TOHTI AND THE SAKHAROV PRIZE

10 October 2016

Following Ilham Tohti’s nomination for the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought, UNPO in cooperation with the Ilham Tohti Initiative (ITI) and ChinaChange.org will organise a conference entitled ‘Ilham Tohti and the Sakharov Prize: Courage in the Face of Brutality’ to further highlight the work of Tohti and discuss why he should be rewarded this esteemed human rights prize. Hosted by MEP Ilhan Kyuchyuk, the conference will take place at the European Parliament and will see the participation of Jewher Ilham, daughter of Ilham Tohti. Click here for more information and to register.

Upcoming Events:

10 October: Ilham Tohti Conference at the European Parliament – Brussels

20-23 October: Human Rights Training for IRA Members – Brussels


24-25 November: 9th UN Forum on Minority Issues – Geneva

9TH UN FORUM ON MINORITY ISSUES, GENEVA

24-25 November 2016

The 9th session of the UN Forum on Minority Issues taking place in Geneva will reflect on the specific needs of and disproportionate impacts on minorities in times of humanitarian crisis such as conflict, disaster and pandemics. On the occasion of the Forum UNPO will organise a side-event in collaboration with the Society for Threatened Peoples on Friday 25 November. For more information on the forum and on how to register click here.

UN FORUM ON HUMAN RIGHTS, DEMOCRACY AND THE RULE OF LAW, GENEVA

21-22 November 2016

The UN Forum on Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law will convene for the first time in Geneva. The purpose of the Forum is “to provide a platform for promoting dialogue and cooperation on issues pertaining to the relationship between these areas” and to “identify and analyze best practices, challenges and opportunities for States in their efforts to secure respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law”. For more information and to register click here.

HUMAN RIGHTS TRAINING FOR IRA MEMBERS, BRUSSELS

20-23 October 2016

UNPO, in collaboration with IRA-Mauritania and HIVOS NGO will be organising a human rights training in Brussels, Belgium, on 20-23 October 2016. This interactive workshop, in which several activists from different chapters of IRA Europe will take part, will focus in particular on human rights advocacy opportunities at the European Union and United Nations. Participants will also visit the premises of the European Parliament and meet with an MEP and other human rights activists based in Brussels.

SPEAK OUT! INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS TRAINING, THE HAGUE

9-11 November 2016

The 2016 edition of UNPO’s annual SpeakOut! - a three-day workshop aiming to train young activists to become reliable channels of human rights advocacy, will take place in The Hague in November. The workshop will particularly focus on youth empowerment, communication strategies and creative activism and will include a half-day visit to the International Criminal Court. Click here for more information and to register (deadline 9 October 2016).

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We rely on financial support from our Members and friends to continue our work each year. Such donations are crucial to ensure the continued full participation and engagement of a great number of unrepresented communities, indigenous peoples, minorities and occupied or unrecognized territories.

The 2012-2015 Secretary General’s Activity Report provides an overview of the activities we have been working on over the past years with the help of our partners. Please do also spread the word about UNPO or invite your friends to like our Facebook page or follow us on Twitter.