

# Pashtun Lives Matter: A Call for Accountability and Justice at the 52nd Human Rights Council Session

*Breaking the Silence: Prominent Human Rights Groups Take the Stage at the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva for Pashtun Resilience in the Face of Oppression*

GENEVA, SWITZERLAND, March 20, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Human rights defender Andy Vermaut exposed the dire conditions faced by Pashtuns in Pakistan, calling for urgent action from the international community. This all took place on the historic session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva on March 17, 2023. Invited by

the Tumuku Development and Cultural Union, Vermaut made a passionate speech as Chairman of the fundamental human rights movement Postversa and the World Council for Public Diplomacy and Community Dialogue. He highlighted the systemic racism and racial profiling of

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*Fazal-Ur Rehman Afridi,  
Human Rights Defender,*



Andy Vermaut speaks at the 52nd Human Rights Council Session in Geneva, calling for justice and accountability for Pashtuns in Pakistan.

Pashtuns, the increase in enforced disappearances, and the indiscriminate use of landmines by the Pakistani military. Vermaut urged the United Nations to address these issues with the Pakistani government and protect the fundamental rights of ethnic Pashtuns. During his important visit to the UN in Geneva, Vermaut was accompanied by human rights activist [Fazal-Ur Rehman Afridi](#), who emphasized the importance of the international community in addressing human rights violations in Pakistan.

Prominent human rights defender Andy Vermaut made a passionate speech at the 52nd Human Rights Council Session in Geneva, shedding light on the dire conditions faced by Pashtuns ethnic minority in Pakistan. He brought attention to the increase in enforced disappearances in Khyber

Pakhtunkhwa and the alarming number of Pashtuns who have been forcibly disappeared by Pakistani military and its secret services this year. Andy Vermaut also shared that Pakistani officials have confirmed that hundreds of Pakistanis were handed over to foreign countries for money. In 2022, the Pashtuns have reported 30 confirmed and more than 100 unconfirmed cases of enforced disappearances in KPK, and PTM has organized several protests in front of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva and in several cities of Khyber Pakistan against the Enforced Disappearance, target killings, and torture. Another issue Andy Vermaut raised was the indiscriminate use of landmines by Pakistan Army during different operations in EX-FATA that continue to kill women, children, and animals. He shared reports of 25 landmine victims in South & North Waziristan in 2022 alone. Andy Vermaut also condemned the National Logistic Cell, an organization run by Pakistan Army, for grabbing lands in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) from locals without due process, their consent, or compensation. He cited the recent example of land-grabbing in Bhutan Sharif of Tirah Valley. Similarly, he pointed out how mineral resources of KPK are looted and plundered while locals are neither paid royalty nor employed in petroleum & mining industry. Protests are organized in Bannu, Khyber, Chaman, and Harnayee districts against the loot and plunder of the natural resources of Pashtuns. Andy Vermaut urged the United Nations to take up these issues with the government of Pakistan to protect the basic fundamental rights of ethnic Pashtuns and save lives. The prominent human rights defender's speech was a powerful call to action for the international community to stand up for the oppressed and marginalized Pashtuns in Pakistan.

### Racism and Ethnic Profiling: Pakistan's Plight Against Pashtuns

Pakistan has been in the headlines for many years for its ongoing struggle with terrorism, but there is another issue that is equally serious but is often overlooked: the systemic racism and racial profiling of Pashtuns in the country. Pashtuns are the second-largest ethnic group in Pakistan, making up about 15% of the country's population. However, they are often treated as second-class citizens due to their ethnicity and physical appearance, which has resulted in state oppression and harassment in a systematic manner. The situation is alarming as racial discrimination against Pashtuns is on the rise in Pakistan. Racial profiling of Pashtuns has become a norm, and the removal of Pashto language from educational curriculums of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and prohibition on speaking Pashto in government offices and institutions has further fuelled the issue. The Pakistani government has categorised Pashtuns as 'fanatics and



Human rights activists gather outside the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva to protest the enforced disappearances of Pashtuns in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

terrorists', making them suspects due to their ethnicity and physical appearance. This has resulted in their systematic oppression and harassment by law enforcement agencies.

### Equal rights

The Punjab police issued an instruction to the ordinary public to keep an eye on Pashtun/Afghan street vendors, and hotels were instructed not to rent out rooms to those who looked like Pashtuns. Nadra has blocked or refused to renew identity cards of 100,000 ethnic Pashtuns. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) has condemned this systematic racial profiling of the Pashtun community. The extra-judicial killing of Naqibullah Mehsood, an aspiring model, in February 2018, is one of the extreme examples of racial discrimination and profiling. The police officer responsible for the killing of 444 ethnic Pashtuns, including Mr Mehsood, in fake encounters in the Karachi district of Sindh Province, has been acquitted by the courts of Pakistan despite strong evidence. Instead of resolving the grievances of Pashtuns, Pakistan has blocked the identity card of Manzoor Ahmad Pashteen, head of the Pashtun Protection Movement, and put him on an Exit-Control List. In violation of the constitution of Pakistan, he is barred from entering Bajaur, Mohmand & Orakzai agency in KPK, Kashmir & Gilgit Baltistan, and Balochistan within Pakistan. The government of Pakistan

must take immediate measures to end the systemic racism and ethnic profiling of Pashtuns in the country. The government must implement anti-discrimination laws and policies that ensure equal rights and protection for all citizens, irrespective of their ethnicity or physical appearance. Pakistan must also hold law enforcement agencies accountable for their actions and ensure that



Fazal-Ur Rehman Afridi, a renowned journalist and human rights activist, accompanies Andy Vermaut during his visit to the United Nations.



Four United Nations Special Rapporteurs on human rights express concern over the death of former Senator Usman Kakar and call for an investigation into the alleged "kill list" containing his name and those of other human rights defenders.

those responsible for human rights abuses are brought to justice. It is high time that Pakistan took a strong stance against racism and discrimination and respected the human rights of all its citizens, including Pashtuns.

Andy Vermaut accompanied by Fazal-Ur Rehman Afridi during visit to United Nations

On March 17, 2023, Human Rights Defender Andy Vermaut visited the United Nations in Geneva. During his important visit, he was accompanied by Fazal-Ur Rehman Afridi, a renowned journalist, writer and human rights activist. Afridi, currently serving as PTM's contact person for missing persons, extrajudicial and summary

executions and arbitrary detention at the United Nations, has extensive experience in various fields, including journalism and human rights activism. During the visit to the United Nations, Andy Vermaut spoke about the important role of human rights activists like Afridi in promoting universal human rights. "Fazal-Ur Rehman Afridi is an inspiring example of an individual who has dedicated his life to protecting and promoting people's rights, especially those of the Pashtun community," Vermaut said. "It is an honor to have him here with us today and I am pleased that we are working together to keep issues of human rights on the agenda of the United Nations." Afridi stressed the importance of the United Nations as a platform to draw attention to the many human rights violations taking place in Pakistan against the Pashtun community and others. "It is critical that the international community continue to discuss human rights issues and hold those responsible for these violations accountable," Afridi said. "I am honored to be here today and make my contribution to this important cause."

#### [Afridi on the to "Kill list"](#)

Special Rapporteurs on human rights express concern over the death of former Senator Usman Kakar and call for investigation into alleged "kill list". In Geneva, four United Nations Special Rapporteurs on human rights have expressed concern over the death of former Senator Usman Kakar in unclear circumstances and called for an investigation into the alleged existence of a "kill list" containing his name and those of other human rights defenders. In a joint letter addressed to the Government of Pakistan, the Special Rapporteurs on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; enforced or involuntary disappearances; the situation of human rights defenders; and minority issues cited information received that raises concern about the death of former Senator Usman Kakar and the alleged existence of a "kill list" containing his name and those of other individuals, including human rights defenders Mr. Fazal-ur Rehman Afridi and Ms. Gul



Andy Vermaut meets with Pashtun leaders to discuss their grievances and work towards a better future for the ethnic minority in Pakistan.

Bukhari, and [former Senator Mr. Farhatullah Babar](#). The letter highlighted the alleged threats, intimidation, and acts of reprisals against persons associated with Mr. Kakar, including human rights defenders, and called for immediate action to be taken to protect them from threats to their lives and well-being or intimidation of any kind in the future. The Special Rapporteurs also raised concern about the discrepancy in the autopsy report and the observations of the doctors who supervised the post-mortem, and the failure to carry out an effective investigation into Mr. Kakar's death. Similarly, they raised concern about the abduction of Mr. Kakar in 2018 and the lack of proper investigation into it to explain what happened and to identify the perpetrators. The letter requested the Government of Pakistan to provide any additional information and/or comments they may have on the allegations, information about whether any investigation and judicial or other inquiry has been undertaken in relation to the death of Mr. Kakar and whether these were conducted in compliance with international human rights standards, information about measures taken to protect persons associated with Mr. Kakar from acts of intimidation, threats, and harassment, and information about the measures taken to ensure that human rights defenders are able to carry out their peaceful and legitimate work in a safe and enabling environment. The Special Rapporteurs urged that all necessary interim measures be taken to prevent any irreparable harm to the life and personal integrity of Mr. Fazal-ur Rehman Afridi, Mr. Farhatullah Babar, and Ms. Gul Bukhari, halt the alleged violations and prevent their re-occurrence, and in the event that the investigations support or suggest the allegations to be correct, to ensure the accountability of any person(s) responsible for the alleged violations. The joint letter was sent in accordance with the mandates provided to the Special Rapporteurs by the Human Rights Council to seek to clarify all cases brought to their attention.

### Accountability

Andy Vermaut, president of the World Council for Public Diplomacy and Community Dialogue, strongly expressed his support for human rights activists Morris Tidball-Binz, Aua Baldé, Mary Lawlor and Fernand de Varennes. These four individuals are United Nations Special Rapporteurs and work tirelessly to promote human rights worldwide. Tidball-Binz, Baldé, Lawlor and de Varennes are true heroes of the human rights movement who have dedicated their lives to investigating and raising serious human rights violations, such as extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, enforced disappearances, the plight of human rights defenders and minority issues. Andy Vermaut fully supports their efforts and has announced that he will personally raise this issue with the European diplomatic community. He is determined to work to address human rights violations and promote accountability for such actions, which flagrantly violate fundamental principles of human dignity. The World Council for Public Diplomacy and Community Dialogue is proud to partner with these human rights defenders and welcomes all efforts to address human rights issues and fight for social justice worldwide. Andy Vermaut explains: "We call on all governments and organizations to take this cause seriously and unite in the fight against human rights violations. The World Council for Public Diplomacy and Community Dialogue will continue to work with organizations and individuals committed to promoting human rights and social justice worldwide, and will not rest until all human rights are respected and protected around the world."

To learn more about Fazal-Ur Rehman Afridi and his work as a human rights activist, visit the website of the Institut de recherche et d'études stratégiques de Khyber (IRESK) at <https://khyber-institute.com>

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