

Over 100 INGOs still awaiting ministry's approval

ISLAMABAD: While the deadline for the scrutiny and approval of applications by over 100 international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) – that applied for online registration under the new policy to regulate their working in Pakistan – has passed, the interior ministry has only cleared 26 such organisations so far.

Of the 130 INGOs that applied for registration, only 26 have been formally granted permission to continue operating in the country, documents recently laid before the National Assembly reveal.

According to an interior ministry document, 19 of the 26 approved INGOs had signed memoranda of understanding (MoUs) with the ministry, while seven were still operating under “interim permission”.

According to the documents laid before the lower house of parliament, the mandate of INGO registration was shifted from the Economic Affairs Division to the ministry in June last year and the new policy for regulation of INGOs in Pakistan was subsequently promulgated on October 1, 2015.

The policy clearly states that all INGOs were required to apply for fresh registration on the newly introduced online form “within 60 days from the date of proclamation of this policy”.

Then, “scrutiny of applications will be done... within a period of 60 days,” and approved INGOs will be registered “after consultation with the relevant federal and provincial authorities,” the policy stated.

But even though this 120-day period expired sometime earlier this year, the ministry has only been able to register a mere 20pc of all applicants.

Interior Secretary Arif Khan told Dawn that the ministry had inked MoUs with 25 INGOs and that another 14 would be signed over the next two weeks.

Ministry's own deadline for approval of applications already passed; secy claims 14 more MoUs to be signed over next couple of weeks

Those organisations which had applied for registration but had yet to be approved, he said, had temporary permission to operate – under the new policy – until a decision on their applications.

Another senior ministry official told Dawn that only 75 of the 130 applicants may be granted approval. He said that intelligence agencies had provided reports about the applicants, adding

that there were unfavourable reports about certain INGOs, without revealing more details about the kind of suspicions agencies had regarding those organisations.

The official said that following the completion of the MoU-signing exercise with cleared INGOs, those who had yet to submit certain key documents will be given a cut-off date.

According to the documents laid before the National Assembly last week, the following INGOs have signed MoUs with the ministry: International Islamic Charitable Organisation (Kuwait), Foundation of Open Society Institute, Action Against Hunger and International Medical Corps(USA), Johnither International, Welthungerhilfe/ German Agro Action and Malteser International (Germany), Brien Holden Vision Institute (Australia), Merlin, HelpAge International and Tearfund (United Kingdom), Cure2Children and Smile Again (Italy), Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition and International Catholic Migration Commission (Switzerland), Japan Council on Independent Living Centres (Japan), Solidarités International (France), Trocaire (Ireland) and Oxfam Novib (Netherlands).

In addition, the following INGOs are currently said to be operating under interim permission: Medicines Sans Frontiers (Belgium), Teen Challenge, Jhpiego and Care International (USA), Volunteer Services Overseas (UK), International Islamic Relief Organisation and Handicap International (France). The new policy to regulate the operations of INGOs, unveiled in October last year, contained several stringent stipulations and imposed harsher paperwork requirements in applicant organisations.

The policy warns INGOs against engaging in money laundering, terror-financing, weapons smuggling, anti-state activities or maintaining links with proscribed organisations.

INGOs have been barred from taking part in any kind of political activity or conducting any research or surveys irrelevant to their terms of reference.

The right of appeal will be applicable only in cases where registration has been cancelled and the INGO has the right to file a representation before a special ministerial committee, to be constituted and notified by the government.

However, the cancellation of registration is not open for challenge in any court of law. The INGOs will also be obliged to provide any information that the government may require from time to time.

INGOs will also not be able to provide monetary or material assistance to another INGO or local NGOs without prior government approval.

Published in Dawn, April 19th, 2016

