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**CIVIL AND POLITICAL RIGHTS**

**Written statement\* submitted by Interfaith International,  
a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[15 February 2005]

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\* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

Interfaith International is concerned about the situation of human rights in Pakistan, which has significantly deteriorated during 2004.

Interfaith International would like to bring Pakistan's widespread violations of the civil and political rights of the Sindhi people to the attention of the United Nations Human Rights Commission. We will focus particularly on religious intolerance and violations of the right to freedom of expression.

### **Religious Intolerance**

Of the approximately 30 million Sindhis living in Sindh today, an estimated 3 million are Hindus that particularly suffer under Pakistan's oppressive laws and discriminatory practices. Pakistan imposes the death penalty for blasphemy or apostasy. The definition of blasphemy includes ridiculing or criticizing fundamentalist Islamic beliefs, and members of religious minorities are frequently charged with this crime.

The law and practices of Pakistan discriminate against minorities in other ways. In civil and criminal trials, the testimony of a witness belonging to a religious minority is deemed inherently untrustworthy. A non-Muslim man may not marry a Muslim woman. By law, members of the religious minorities cannot hold executive positions such as Mayor, Governor, or President.

Hindu Sindhis are particularly insecure. Kidnapping middle-class Sindhis for ransom is frequent in the province, and the Pakistani police are generally unconcerned about the treatment of Hindu victims. In January 2004, five people were kidnapped near Shahdatkot; within days, the police secured the release of four of the victims, but not Vijay Kumar, the one Hindu among them.

In fact, the police have been accused of actively participating in the epidemic of kidnappings and looting in Sindh. In January 2004, in the village of Kabir Ghangri near Kandiaro, a 2 a.m. raid to loot and kidnap was reportedly carried out by the police while still in uniform. With the connivance of the Pakistani authorities, tens of thousands of Sindhis, including a disproportionately large number of Hindu and Christian Sindhis, are held in virtual slavery as bonded laborers.

The last census systematically undercounted the number of Sindhis. An insufficient number of census forms were printed in Sindhi, so data could not be collected in many remote villages. In addition, Hindu Sindhis were intimidated by Pakistani soldiers who accompanied the census takers in Sindh. On the first day of the census, soldiers shot a 50 year-old Hindu Sindhi father to death in front of his teenage son. The electoral power of minorities has been further marginalized through gerrymandering and a system of separate electorates that is still used in local elections.

In the eastern desert region of Sindh that borders India, Pakistani paramilitary forces have been periodically accused of violating the fundamental human rights of Hindu Sindhis. The Pakistani government has designated the homes and businesses of Hindu Sindhis in this area as 'Enemy Evacuee Property' and seized the legal deeds to their properties. On July 27, 2004, over 50 Sindhis fasted in a 'hunger strike' in Nangar Parkar, Sindh in order to protest the Pakistani paramilitary and police forces that were violating the chastity of women in the region.

Islamic Studies has been made a compulsory subject for Muslims in all government and private schools. The officially mandated textbooks preach a fundamentalist and militant ideology, contravening the indigenous universalist Sufi beliefs of the Sindhis. The promotion of hatred and intolerance is not confined to textbooks for religious studies; it extends to even the language and history textbooks that are required in compulsory classes. In particular, the textbooks stereotype Hindus and Jews as ‘conniving’ and ‘scheming.’

Hindu and Christian places of worship have been frequently ransacked by Islamic fundamentalists in different parts of Pakistan. A large number of Christians and Ahmadi, an Islamic heterodoxy accused of heresy by fundamentalists, have found refuge in Sindh, and the Pakistani government has tried to extend the reach of its oppressive laws into Sindh’s tolerant towns. In one case, a non-Sindhi judge in Karachi ordered the local police in Larkano, Sindh to charge an Ahmadi refugee with blasphemy for professing to be Muslim. On July 27, 2004, Rev. Khalid Soomro, a translator of the Bible into Sindhi, was attacked in Shikarpur, Sindh by members of a non-Sindhi Jihadi group for refusing to convert to Islam; his family was threatened and his house burned down. The Pakistani government has also been accused of fomenting violence against Hindus by sending agitators into small towns and villages.

### **The Rights of Women**

In traditional Sindhi culture and folklore, women are celebrated for their independent and adventurous spirit. Many Sindhi folktales are legends about heroines who defied family or social custom to choose their own marriage partners.

Pakistan has imposed harsh measures against women; for example, they deny women their right to choose marriage partners. In contravention of Article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Pakistan makes it illegal for a Muslim woman to marry a non-Muslim man. On January 26, 2005, Pakistani police in Tando Adam, Sindh, arrested Saif Masih, a Christian man, and Ruksana Bhatti, a Muslim woman, for attempting to get married.

Pakistan has condoned so-called honor killings, which allow relatives to kill an unrelated man and woman on the slightest suspicion of adultery. Sometimes this suspicion is founded on nothing more than socializing, or marrying outside the community. A historic account by Richard Burton in the 19th century provides a contrast between the rarity of such killings in Sindh and their frequency in Afghanistan and the Middle-East. Today, encouraged by fundamentalist clerics, about 300 young men and women are killed each year. For example, on June 22, 2004, 19 year-old Ms. Resham Junejo and 30 year-old Mr. Mukhtiar Junejo were killed in Garhi Yaseen, Sindh.

Pakistan continues to protect powerful individuals accused of this crime by allowing them to make payments to victims’ families in order to have murder charges dropped. Often families are harassed and forced to accept such payments.

A woman who is raped must produce at least four Muslim eye-witnesses in court to prove her case. If she is impregnated by a rapist but cannot prove it, she is charged with the offence of adultery, punishable by death. It is estimated that the majority of women in prison today are charged with adultery. These oppressive conditions strongly discourage the participation of women in civic life. The Zina ordinance makes unlawful sexual intercourse, including adultery and rape, punishable by death by stoning and makes a wrongful accusation of Zina a crime. As Amnesty International observes:

These laws place an almost impossible burden of proof on women and girls who are raped. If they report a rape to the police they are often charged with Zina crimes because they have in effect admitted to sexual intercourse outside of marriage and been unable to prove absence of consent. In such cases, the victims are more likely to be convicted than the perpetrators.

Furthermore, a woman may inherit only half as much as a man. A woman cannot be a judge in a Sharia court—courts that adjudicate cases of marriage, divorce, inheritance, blasphemy, apostasy, and other matters.

### **Freedom of Expression**

Pakistani authorities are trying to censor and exert control over the independent Sindhi media, such as Sindhi newspapers and electronic media, which are generally supportive of democratic and secular values. Pakistani authorities have used various overt and covert means to control these newspapers. One of these means is economic: Pakistan controls all public and private advertising in newspapers through a government body called the Pakistan Information Board. In 2003, the government ordered a cut in Sindhi newspapers' advertisement 'quota' by an additional 50%. Although Sindhi speakers account for about 20% of Pakistan's population, Sindhi newspapers now receive less than 1% of the total advertising revenue.

Pakistan has frequently banned Sindhi books, newspapers, and magazines. In 1975, the largest circulating women's magazine Sojhiro ('Daylight') was banned. In 1999, the largest circulating Sindhi monthly magazine Subhu Thiindo ('A New Day will Dawn'), which focused on sustainable development and environmental protection, was banned for spreading disaffection against the 'Islamic ideology of Pakistan.' The government often uses violence and intimidation against journalists. For example, in August 2003, six Sindhi journalists covering a peaceful protest during the Pakistani dictator General Musharraf's visit to a college were arrested under 'anti-terrorism' laws. In the past two years, two journalists have been killed for covering corruption, and the government has failed to aggressively investigate the crimes.

### **Impunity**

Before concluding, Interfaith International would like to point to recent events in Pakistan that are illustrative of the impunity with which the Pakistan military violates the rights of people. On January 2, 2005, a Sindhi woman physician serving a rural area of neighboring Baluchistan was allegedly gang-raped by an officer of the Pakistani military and his cohorts. The army interfered with the local police investigation, to the extent of shooting at the police in order to force them to surrender witnesses under interrogation. While the suspects enjoyed impunity, hundreds of protestors were arbitrarily arrested.

### **Recommendations**

Interfaith International specifically requests the Member States of the Commission on Human Rights, together with the UN Special Rapporteurs, to find the best methods to encourage Pakistan to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Right (ICCPR) and to fulfill its international legal obligations.

Urge the Pakistani Authorities to:

- Scrap all laws that discriminate against minorities, and institute a review of the laws on blasphemy.
- Treat Sindhi Hindus, Christians, Ahmadis, and all other religious minorities as equal citizens and grant them the right to profess and practice their faith.
- Ban the provocative religious speeches and the issuing of fatwas.
- Give minority groups the full protection under the law.
- Urgently repeal laws that are discriminatory to women, including the Hudood and Zina Ordinance.
- Punish those guilty of crimes against women under the law and ensure that women are granted full legal protection.
- Halt the increased intimidation of journalists by Pakistani intelligence.
- Place the Audit Bureau of Circulation under independent and transparent control to avoid misuse of advertisement allocation as a means of coercion.

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