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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by Nord-Sud XXI - North-South XXI, 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.

[31 January 2024]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



Cases of Atrocities Against Ethnic and Religious Minorities in Pakistan in 2023

“Mr. Tian”

On April 15th, the Chinese man was identified in a Pakistani police report as 'Mr. Tian' and described as a transportation supervisor at the Dasu hydropower project, led by China's Gezhouba Group construction and engineering company. He was taken into custody after being accused of insulting the Holy Prophet. According to locals, the man had complained to workers at the dam that 'precious time' was being lost due to prayer breaks and urged them to speed up their pace. This enraged some of the workers, and they fanned out to nearby villages, stirring up emotions. A large, frenzied crowd then made its way towards Kamila Bazaar and blocked the Karakoram Highway (KKH), threatening to storm the Dasu Hydropower Project (DHP) site if the Chinese man was not arrested. 'We have arrested the foreigner suspect under blasphemy and terrorism charges and airlifted him from here to present him before the anti-terrorism court (ATC) in Abbottabad,' Mohammad Khalid, the district police officer (DPO) in Upper Kohistan, told reporters.

Mussarat Bibi,

On April 24th, Mussarat Bibi, a 46-year-old Christian woman, and Muhammad Sarmad, a Muslim man, were accused of burning pages of the Holy Quran while cleaning the storeroom of the Government Girls Higher Secondary School in the Arifwala tehsil of Pakpattan District, Punjab. The allegations were leveled by Kashif Nadeem, a resident of the town. Both workers had been instructed to clean the storeroom, which was filled with paper and other scrapped items. The complainant initially named only the Christian woman, but the investigation revealed Sarmad's involvement as well. It was found that both had not intentionally burned the pages, as they were illiterate. The police arrested them to prevent potential unrest by protesters

S.N. & A.B.

On May 18th, two Christian teenagers, S.N., 12, and A.B., 17, were booked under Section 295-C of the PPC. Both boys were arrested following a complaint made against them by police constable Zahid Sohail, who accused them of disrespecting the Holy Prophet. A.B.'s father informed the media that both boys were engaged in a conversation on the street when Sohail initiated a confrontation and alleged that they had committed blasphemy. 'When elders of the neighborhood asked Sohail to substantiate his accusation with evidence, he failed to satisfy them and left,' said A.B.'s father. The Race Course police later raided the locality and arrested both boys.

Haroon Shehzad

On June 30, Haroon Shehzad, a 49-year-old Christian man, was accused of blasphemy. He shared a Facebook post of the text from First Corinthians chapter 10 on June 27, two days before Eidul Azha, allegedly questioning the sacrifice of animals, as reported by Sajjad Abbas, a Dawn News reporter from Sargodha. A case was registered under Section 295-A of the PPC.

Faisalabad Incident

On August 16, 2023, several hundred people attacked a Christian settlement in Faisalabad district, Punjab province, after accusing two members of the community of committing 'blasphemy.' The armed mob, wielding stones and sticks, vandalized several churches, dozens of houses, and a cemetery. While the police have arrested 130 people alleged to have been involved in the attacks, residents informed local rights activists that hours before the assault, the police warned them about an incoming mob but claimed they could do nothing to stop it. On August 16, after the attack, Interim Prime Minister AnwaarulHaqKakar posted on Twitter that 'stern action would be taken against those who violate the law and target minorities.' 'The Faisalabad attack underscores the failings of Pakistan's police to adequately protect religious minority communities and respond promptly to violence targeting them,' said Patricia Gossman, associate Asia director at Human Rights Watch. 'The lack of prosecutions of those responsible for such crimes in the past emboldens those who commit violence in the name of religion.'

Zaki Masih

On July 8, Sargodha Police arrested a 35-year-old Christian man named ZakiMasih after a case was filed against him under Sections 295-A and 298 of the PPC. The charges were brought forward by Muhammad Awais, a local resident, who alleged that Zaki had shared a blasphemous post on Facebook. Despite receiving support from the Imam of the village mosque and other Muslims in the neighborhood who confirmed that Zaki's post did not disrespect any religion, he was taken into custody. Zaki's brother explained that the post was written by a Muslim individual criticizing those involved in food adulteration. The family believes that the case against Zaki stems from a long-standing land dispute with individuals who continue to harbor grudges, despite attempts at reconciliation through village elders.

Religious minorities in Pakistan are coming under increasing persecution and attacks, due to which their numbers are dwindling rapidly. Human Rights Council and its special procedures must intervene to curb such religious persecution and promotion of intolerance in Pakistan society. Religious minorities in Pakistan are forced to live a terrible life with imminent attacks looming large and no hope for recourse from state oppression.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1770617>

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/08/22/pakistan-mob-attacks-christian-settlement>