



General Assembly

Distr.: General
8 March 2024

English only

Human Rights Council

Fifty-fifth session

26 February–5 April 2024

Agenda item 3

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

Written statement* submitted by Victorious Youths Movement, 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.

[30 January 2024]

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



Christians: Long Persecuted Minority Community in Pakistan

Christians, who make up less than 2% of the population in Pakistan, have, for decades, faced daily discrimination and persecution in Pakistan. The majority of Pakistani Christians lives in extreme poverty and endures threats of incarceration, violence and even death simply for practicing their faith. They are looked down upon and treated as second class citizens. In addition, their women and girls have become vulnerable to forced conversions and marriages with little legal protection.

Christians face high levels of discrimination across Pakistan due to their religious identity. This discrimination often determines what jobs they obtain, schools they attend, and even neighborhoods they live in. The government-sponsored discrimination is usually witnessed in job advertisements where vacancies for sanitation positions are reserved only for the members of the Christian community. Known as the 'Christian sweeper community', Christians in Pakistan make up 80% to 90% of the sanitation workforce, including country's street sweepers, janitors, and sewer workers sweeping piles of garbage off the streets, and performing hazardous sewer maintenance. According to a New York Times report, one man, Jamshed Eric, recounted the stark reality of the work in the report explaining, "It is a difficult job. In the gutter, I am often surrounded by swarms of cockroaches".

The sweeper community is only one aspect of the stark discrimination endured by Pakistan's Christians. Due to the devastating poverty they face, many Christians resort to borrowing money from corrupt loan brokers who, in turn, make it nearly impossible for the borrowers to pay off their loans. The debt is then exploited as they are offered to work in brick kilns for extremely low wages in an effort to pay down their debt. The kilns offer little more than inhumane, unsanitary working conditions and staggering heat.

The under reporting of Christian population in the national database of Pakistan is another discriminatory practice towards the community. Christian religious and political leaders claim that undercounting is deliberately done to prevent proportionate political representation of the Christian community in the Pakistan's national and provincial legislatures. This further prevents them from claiming their voting rights and other identity documents. Moreover, this also means more Christians being excluded from the government welfare and employment schemes due to the undercount.

Rising incidents of persecution have been documented by International Christian Concern (ICC), a United States of America (the) based organization taking up the cause of persecuted Christians across the globe. Though there is a spate of incidents of violence against Christian community, some of the most notable ones that occurred in the year 2023 are listed below:

The use, and misuse, of blasphemy laws to target and persecute Christian communities has escalated in recent years. In August 2023, much of the world was shocked by the nightmare that descended on a Christian community in Pakistan. The tranquility of the quiet, Christian suburb of Faisalabad, Pakistan was shattered when 5,000 radical Muslims descended upon Jaranwala in a rampage. They set 26 churches ablaze, along with 196 homes, and many businesses. The uproar began when a Muslim man, driven by malice, made a false blasphemy charge against a Christian teen. It was a petty dispute over a business transaction that spiraled into a nightmare. The streets that once echoed with hymns and prayers now bore witness to an inferno fueled by intolerance. This incident, and many others like it, has continued to raise concerns among Pakistan's Christian communities. Pakistan's constitutional endorsement of Islam and blasphemy laws makes it easier for Christians to be imprisoned or killed.

In another incident, a Christian couple was taken into custody and charged in violation of blasphemy laws in September 2023 for no fault of theirs. Supposedly, some children, while having fun, were throwing torn pages of the Quran from the rooftop of a house that was owned by the couple. Though couple was not all involved in the act, they are taken into custody and are now awaiting legal proceedings.

In an act of religious hatred, F.Q., a 20 year old Christian man, was shot and killed by a Muslim extremist Muhammad Zubair on November 09, 2023. Zubair broke into the home of F. and shot him thrice. After the murder, he held the family hostage for nearly an hour, refusing to allow them to call for help. The family of the victim is currently seeking financial assistance to secure legal representation, without which, the murderer may be set free.

Pakistan continues to exhibit itself as a narrow minded, intolerant society that has no place for religious minorities, especially for the Christians. A day in Pakistan does not pass without news of enforced disappearances, forced conversions, killings of Christian community members. The government of Pakistan needs to understand that building national unity and integration is possible only by embracing people's diverse religious and cultural significance and therefore, all possible steps must be taken to protect the rights of the minority community and enable them to live according to their religious traditions.

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