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## Human Rights Council

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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 Association Un Enfant Un Cartable Du Burkina Faso, 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]

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



## Pakistan's Deepening Child Labor and Sexual Abuse Crisis

Pakistan faces a harrowing surge in child abuse, particularly in terms of sexual and labor-related crimes, as revealed by a recent report from Sahil, a non-profit organization dedicated to child protection. The statistics paint a distressing picture, with an average of twelve children falling victim to sexual abuse every day in the first half of 2023. This concerning trend necessitates immediate and comprehensive action to address the escalating crisis. Beyond the raw figures, it is imperative to critically examine the role of the Pakistani state in addressing and preventing child abuse. This disconcerting trend not only demands immediate and comprehensive action but also prompts a scathing inquiry into the role of the Pakistani state in addressing and, more critically, preventing this harrowing child abuse epidemic.

Sahil's "Six Months Cruel Numbers 2023" report provides a comprehensive examination of the prevailing situation. The organization meticulously compiled data from 86 national and regional newspapers, focusing on various aspects of child abuse, including sexual abuse, abduction, missing children, and early and forced marriages.

The first six months of 2023 witnessed a staggering 2,227 reported cases of child sexual abuse, marking a concerning increase from the previous year. Of significant concern is the continued vulnerability of children aged 6-15, constituting 47% of all reported cases.

The disproportionate impact on girls, accounting for 54% of the victims, highlights a deeply concerning pattern of gender-based victimization in Pakistan's child abuse crisis. Within the vulnerable age bracket of 6-15 years, the disconcerting revelation that more boys (593) experienced abuse than girls (457) signals a distressing trend that demands immediate attention and intervention. This gender-specific disparity underscores the urgent need for targeted efforts to address the unique challenges faced by girls in the realm of child abuse. Beyond the raw numbers, the emotional, psychological, and societal consequences for these young victims are severe, necessitating a comprehensive approach to protect and empower girls who find themselves at the intersection of vulnerability and systemic neglect. The distressing statistics underscore the imperative for urgent and gender-sensitive measures to rectify this deeply unsettling trend.

The prevalence of abduction as the predominant crime category, constituting 44% of reported cases, underscores a deeply troubling reality in Pakistan. This alarming trend signifies not only the physical peril faced by the abducted children but also the potential for further heinous acts, as indicated by the disturbing statistics of sodomy, rape, and instances involving child sexual abuse and pornography. The intersection of these crimes paints a harrowing picture, with 72% of the victims being boys. This gender-specific vulnerability raises concerns about the targeted nature of these offenses and emphasizes the urgent need for comprehensive measures to safeguard children. The dangers posed by these crimes extend beyond immediate physical harm, encompassing long-lasting psychological and emotional repercussions, creating a perilous environment for the young and vulnerable in Pakistani society. The urgency to address and combat this multifaceted crisis is paramount to ensure the safety and well-being of the nation's children.

The revelation surrounding abusers and their relationships in the reported cases, totaling 2,531, unfolds a disturbing narrative of familial or known connections exacerbating the child abuse crisis in Pakistan. Shockingly, acquaintances were responsible for 912 cases, while strangers committed the crime in 498 instances. The most disturbing revelation is the involvement of both strangers and acquaintances in 16% of cases, underscoring the complexity and insidious nature of these crimes (Cruel Report, 2023).

Adding to the distressing panorama is the varied geography of abuse, as highlighted in the report's exploration of the locations where these heinous acts transpire. A staggering 31% of these crimes unfold in public spaces, such as streets, amplifying the vulnerability of children even in seemingly communal settings. Equally alarming is the revelation that 11% of abuses occur within victims' homes, 4% in fields, and 2% in places of worship and educational institutes (Cruel Report, 2023). This diversity of locations underscores the pervasive nature of the crisis, reaching into the very fabric of daily life.

The involvement of law enforcement in addressing these crimes becomes a critical factor in mitigating the child abuse epidemic. While 88% of cases were officially registered with the police, the troubling aspect emerges with the 25 cases that either went unfilled or were outright refused by the police. This raises serious questions about the efficacy of the justice system and the accessibility of legal recourse for victims, further deepening the sense of impunity surrounding perpetrators.

Comparative analysis between data from the first half of 2023 and the previous year reveals an unsettling upward trend, particularly in cases involving the sexual abuse of boys, with a marked increase of 16 reported cases. The total cases of abuse against boys amounted to 1,020, while girls faced 1,207 reported cases. This data underscores the vulnerability of minors aged 6-15, constituting 47% of all victims, further emphasizing the urgent need for tailored interventions for this demographic.

Regional disparities add another layer to the complex crisis, with Sindh reporting the highest number of cases (483), closely followed by Punjab (233).

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 187 cases were officially recorded, emphasizing the widespread nature of the problem in this area. In contrast, Balochistan documented 30 cases. PoJK reported the fewest incidents with 15 cases, and Gilgit Baltistan recorded an exceptionally low number of only four cases. This regional concentration underscores the need for decisive action by the federal government to address the child abuse epidemic comprehensively.

Additional insights into the broader landscape of child abuse in Pakistan, as estimated by child experts, reveal a grim reality where approximately five lakh children face physical assaults annually. Furthermore, the alarming practice of nearly 46 lakh girls being married before the age of 15 accentuates the urgency for a crackdown on deeply entrenched malpractices, necessitating not only legal reforms but also robust societal and cultural shifts to protect the nation's children.

### **Question of State Accountability ?**

While the report sheds light on the distressing state of child abuse in Pakistan, it is essential to critically examine the role of the Pakistani state in tackling this pervasive issue. The state's responsibility in ensuring the safety and well-being of its youngest citizens cannot be overstated, and any failure in this regard warrants scrutiny.

The figures presented by Sahil indicate not only a rise in child abuse cases but also a disturbing pattern of familiarity between abusers and victims. In over 2,500 cases, abusers were known to the victims or their families. This raises questions about the effectiveness of state mechanisms in preventing abuse within familial or known circles.

The location data is equally concerning, with a significant percentage of abuse occurring in public spaces, streets, and even places of worship and educational institutes. The state's responsibility extends to ensuring the safety of children in these environments, and the prevalence of abuse in such locations raises questions about the adequacy of law enforcement and preventive measures.

The disparity between reported cases and those filed or refused by the police adds another layer to the critique. While 88% of cases were officially registered, the fact that 25 cases were either not filed or rejected by the police indicates potential shortcomings in the justice system. This raises concerns about the accessibility of justice for victims and the efficacy of law enforcement in addressing child abuse cases.

The escalating crisis of child abuse in Pakistan demands not only immediate and concerted efforts from the government, civil society, and international organizations but also a critical examination of the state's role in addressing and preventing such atrocities. Beyond addressing the immediate concerns highlighted by Sahil's report, there is a pressing need for the Pakistani state to be proactive in implementing preventive measures, strengthening law enforcement, and fostering a culture of accountability.

While the figures presented by Sahil expose the grim reality of child abuse, they should serve as a catalyst for comprehensive reforms rather than mere condemnation. The Pakistani state must take swift and decisive action to protect its most vulnerable citizens, ensuring that perpetrators are held accountable, victims receive justice, and preventive measures are robustly implemented. The future well-being of the nation's children hinges not only on immediate actions but on a sustained commitment to eradicating child abuse and fostering a safer environment for all.

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CRUEL Number, 6 Months Report

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1771902>

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[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/374870592\\_Understanding\\_the\\_Prevalence\\_of\\_Child\\_Abuse\\_in\\_Pakistan\\_A\\_Comprehensive\\_Study/link/6533e5375d51a8012b5b1c62/download?\\_tp=eyJjb250ZXh0Ijp7ImZpcnN0UGFnZSI6InB1YmxpY2F0aW9uIiwicGFnZSI6InB1YmxpY2F0aW9uIn19](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/374870592_Understanding_the_Prevalence_of_Child_Abuse_in_Pakistan_A_Comprehensive_Study/link/6533e5375d51a8012b5b1c62/download?_tp=eyJjb250ZXh0Ijp7ImZpcnN0UGFnZSI6InB1YmxpY2F0aW9uIiwicGFnZSI6InB1YmxpY2F0aW9uIn19)

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