



International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination

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Summary record of the 3085th meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Thursday, 8 August 2024, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Mr. Balcerzak

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Consideration of reports, comments and information submitted by States parties under article 9 of the Convention *(continued)*

Combined twenty-fourth to twenty-sixth periodic reports of Pakistan
([CERD/C/PAK/24-26](#); [CERD/C/PAK/Q/24-26](#))

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Pakistan joined the meeting.*
2. **A representative of Pakistan** said that her country's combined twenty-fourth to twenty-sixth periodic reports ([CERD/C/PAK/24-26](#)) had been prepared through an inclusive, consultative process involving all national stakeholders, including relevant civil society organizations. As one of the first signatories to the Convention, Pakistan remained fully committed to eliminating racial discrimination in all its forms. The Constitution provided for the equitable sharing of resources between all provinces, and the Government made strenuous efforts to ensure that the benefits of development reached all its citizens.
3. Pakistan had continued to make significant progress towards implementing a number of the recommendations made by the Committee in 2016. In 2023, the Government had carried out its first digital census, the results of which had revealed significant increases in the number of Hindus and Christians living in the country. The National Commission for Human Rights, which had recently been granted category A status by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions, had received a total of 2,455 complaints between 2018 and 2023, of which 2,301 had been resolved. In 2023, the Federal Investigation Agency had registered 85 cases of hate speech and the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority had submitted 4,047 requests asking international social media organizations to block hateful content directed at minorities. The Government deployed security personnel in significant numbers to protect non-Muslim places of worship, particularly during religious festivals, and, during the previous financial year, the provincial government of Sindh had allocated 900 million Pakistan rupees to construct and renovate Hindu temples. People of all religious beliefs were protected under blasphemy laws. A total of 276 blasphemy cases had been registered over the previous six years, resulting in nine convictions. The Legal Aid and Justice Authority Act had been enacted in 2020, and provincial governments were taking steps to strengthen their own provision of legal aid. In 2023 alone, over 50,000 labour inspections had been carried out as part of measures taken to combat bonded labour and protect the rights of minority workers. The courts acted with due diligence to ensure that all persons responsible for offences related to forced conversions and marriages were brought to justice, and five such cases had been registered in Sindh Province. Members of religious minorities were eligible to benefit from government welfare schemes such as the Benazir Income Support Programme and the Minorities Welfare Fund.
4. The Government's cooperation in the context of the recent visit by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees had demonstrated its commitment to working closely with the international community to improve the situation facing Afghan refugees. However, Pakistan faced serious security and economic challenges. The Government's plan to repatriate illegal migrants was compatible with international law and its sovereign rights.
5. Several legislative measures had been taken to protect the rights of vulnerable groups in recent years, including enactment of the Enforcement of Women's Property Rights Act 2020, the Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals Act 2021, the ICT Rights of Persons with Disability Act 2020 and the Anti-Rape (Investigation and Trial) Act 2021. Furthermore, the National Action Plan for Human Rights had been updated in 2020. To strengthen implementation of human rights recommendations, the Government had established a programme to raise awareness of international human rights commitments among public officials, launched the National Mechanism for Reporting and Follow-up project and put in place a human rights management and information system for data collection on human rights indicators.
6. The Government had adopted wide-ranging measures to promote interfaith harmony. The Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority had instructed television and media organizations to remain vigilant and promptly report any content aimed at inciting religious discrimination or violence. Interfaith harmony committees, whose members included

religious leaders, had been established to monitor religious sites and promote peaceful coexistence. During the reporting period, a site understood to be the world's largest Sikh gurdwara had been inaugurated in Punjab and a 1,000 year-old Hindu temple in Sialkot had been reopened.

7. Pakistan was committed to strengthening the international normative framework on racial discrimination. In addition to co-sponsoring resolutions intended to combat racism in the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council, it actively participated in the work of the Durban follow-up mechanisms and the Ad Hoc Committee of the Human Rights Council on the Elaboration of Complementary Standards to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. However, the Government also recognized that it faced numerous challenges in its efforts to advance human rights domestically, not least the impact of the conflict in the Middle East, food and energy inflation, rising demands for public health services and disinformation.

8. **Mr. Yeung Sik Yuen** (Country Rapporteur) said that he would like to know in what ways and to what extent the State party had given effect to the provisions of the Convention in its domestic legal order. In that regard, the delegation might like to comment on a suggestion contained in an article published in the Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan that the current Constitution provided for weaker protection of human rights than the Constitution of 1956, not least because it did not include an explicit reference to discrimination on the grounds of race, caste, sex or place of birth. Furthermore, in the light of widespread concerns over the State party's narrow interpretation of the concept of minorities, which focused exclusively on religious minorities, he wished to know whether the delegation saw any serious reason why the Government should not incorporate a comprehensive definition of the term "racial discrimination" into its federal legislation, to cover all the grounds of discrimination included in article 1 (1) of the Convention.

9. The Committee would welcome a comprehensive list of the federal and provincial laws that had been designed to protect the rights set out in the Convention and ensure that the State party fulfilled its obligations as a signatory. In that regard, he wished to know why the Sindh Security of Vulnerable Establishment Bill 2015 had still not been passed into law. Ever since greater powers had been devolved to provincial authorities pursuant to a constitutional amendment in 2010, concerns had been raised over both the competence of provincial assemblies to enact legislation in certain areas and the uneven level of rights protection in different provinces. It would be helpful to know why the federal legislature had not yet taken steps to address those concerns and to tackle to the serious issue of religious intolerance and other forms of discrimination, including on the grounds of race, ethnicity, colour or national origin. He would also like to know whether the State party was considering introducing an interfaith tolerance law and, if so, what steps it had taken in that direction.

10. Although the State party had indicated that judicial investigations were carried out immediately whenever any member of a religious minority had his or her rights infringed, it was disquieting that, when girls belonging to ethnic minorities were removed from their homes by Muslim men, they were almost always found not to be victims of forced conversion or forced marriage. The delegation might like to comment on the allegations and suspicions that the officials tasked with investigating their cases were often motivated by their own ethnic loyalties.

11. In paragraph 24 of the report, the State party had referred to various legislative and policy measures taken to criminalize hate speech and to promote racial and interfaith tolerance. The delegation might like to explain how effective those measures had been and provide information on the number of relevant cases registered, the nature of the allegations and the outcomes of the investigations. He would also be interested to know how the legal procedure in cases concerning hate speech differed from that in cases concerning blasphemy. Given that there were organizations in Pakistan that had been banned and declared illegal because they promoted terrorism, it would be useful to know whether the State party intended to introduce new measures providing for the prohibition of organizations that promoted or incited racial discrimination. The Committee would welcome further information on the measures taken under sections 153 (a) and 505 (2) of the Pakistan Penal Code on the promotion of hatred, including the number of prosecutions brought, the number of convictions secured and the sentences imposed.

12. He would be interested to know whether the delegation had any information on the number of extrajudicial killings that had occurred in relation to blasphemy accusations. It would be helpful to know what measures the State party had taken to promptly investigate such cases and prosecute those responsible. Confirmation as to whether investigations into the high-profile killings of Salman Taseer, Shahbaz Bhatti and Arif Iqbal Bhatti had led to any arrests or prosecutions would be of particular interest. It was stated in the report that recent judgments by the Supreme Court in favour of persons accused of blasphemy had reinforced the belief that there was no justification for civilians taking the law into their own hands by punishing or killing alleged offenders. The delegation might like to comment on the observation that such wording suggested that such actions were not definitively criminalized in domestic law. He would also appreciate a more detailed description of the procedures in place both before and after the change to the preliminary inquiry procedure in blasphemy cases. Lastly, he would welcome the delegation's comments on the concerns raised by the National Commission for Human Rights regarding allegations of entrapment in relation to persons detained by the Federal Investigation Agency on blasphemy charges under the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act 2016.

13. **A representative of Pakistan** said that the national legislation on non-discrimination was in line with article 1 (1) of the Convention. Measures were in place to ensure that religious minorities were represented in government; if the quota was not filled, the seats were not assigned to anyone else. There was a 5 per cent quota for religious minorities in all occupations and a 2 per cent quota in educational institutions. Students from religious minorities were eligible for special scholarships and could not be forced to study a religion other than their own. The Government was providing support for the construction of churches and other places of worship.

14. The stricter the penalty incurred for an offence, the higher the evidentiary standard was for proving guilt. Under the Code of Criminal Procedure, only a police superintendent could initiate investigations in blasphemy cases, and judges could not hear such cases without authorization from the central or provincial government. Any procedural error would result in the acquittal of the defendant. Interfaith harmony centres, which also served as complaints mechanisms, were being set up throughout the country.

15. Freedom of expression was enshrined in the Constitution, with some restrictions. Information would be provided in writing concerning the three murders mentioned by Mr. Yeung Sik Yuen.

16. **A representative of Pakistan** said that standard operating procedures for cases of blasphemy had been formulated by all police departments in the country to ensure that no innocent people could be framed for that offence and that investigations were carried out at the appropriate level. The burden of proof lay with the prosecution, and the provision of false evidence was a punishable offence. Since the adoption of the standard operating procedures, a man in Hyderabad who had been accused of blasphemy had been found innocent, and the investigation into the case had led to the man's Muslim neighbour being prosecuted for defiling the Holy Qur'an.

17. The National Commission for Human Rights took seriously any complaints of framing in blasphemy cases. It had issued initial recommendations to the Ministry of Human Rights, which, only a few days previously, had transmitted a report to be forwarded to the Ministry of Interior for the purpose of establishing a joint investigation to ensure that no innocent people had been framed. Over 95 per cent of the accused in blasphemy cases were Muslim, which demonstrated that the law was not being used in a discriminatory manner.

18. The Senate had adopted resolutions condemning the lynchings in Swat and Sargodha and calling for the investigation to be conducted solely on the basis of the facts. In most cases, such as the incident in which over 20 churches had been burned down and 80 homes damaged, the State provided compensation to the affected families. The fact that the Prime Minister had personally visited the site of that incident illustrated the Government's commitment to the rights of minorities and human rights in general.

19. The detailed definition of discrimination contained in articles 26 and 27 of the Constitution covered not only religious minorities but also race and caste. Discrimination was also an offence under section 153-A of the Penal Code. Similarly, hate speech was

clearly defined in the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, which also punished incitement to sectarian, racial and interfaith hatred.

20. **A representative of Pakistan** said that it was not that Pakistan looked at discrimination from a narrow prism but, rather, that religion was a long-standing fault line in the country and had to be addressed with sensitivity. Moreover, the apparent focus of the delegation's replies on religious minorities was a function of the direction that the dialogue had taken rather than a reflection of the State's stance on discrimination. At least three High Court or Supreme Court judgments reflecting the definition of discrimination contained in the Convention would be provided to the Committee in writing.

21. Between 2020 and 2024, 72 cases of hate speech had been brought before the courts in the Province of Punjab. The cases registered under article 505 of the Penal Code mostly involved statements made against Christians; 19 individuals had been convicted in those cases. In the last five years, there had been 20 cases of hate speech reported in the Province of Sindh, most of which remained pending, and 41 cases of hate speech and hate crimes had been brought before the courts in the Province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In 2024, there had been only one case in the Province of Balochistan.

22. **Mr. Yeung Sik Yuen** said that he would welcome further explanations of the legal concept known as "*challan*". He also wished to know in what year the law that required blasphemy cases to be investigated by a police superintendent had been enacted, what the procedure for filing private complaints of blasphemy had been prior to the entry into force of new law, which authority decided whether a complaint should be referred for prosecution and who the prosecuting authority was. He would also be curious to hear the delegation's views as to why so few of the cases that went to trial resulted in conviction, as seemed to be indicated by the statistical data on hate speech provided in annex B of the State party report.

23. **Ms. Shepherd** said that she was curious to hear how the public was informed of the possibility to lodge a complaint of hate speech, racial profiling or racial discrimination and what the burden of proof was in such cases. She would welcome the delegation's comments on reports that racial profiling of Pashtuns had become the norm, that the group was perceived as terrorists owing to their physical appearance and that instructions had been issued to keep Pashtun street vendors under surveillance and refuse to rent hotel rooms to persons who looked to be Pashtun. Comments on the extrajudicial killing of Pashtuns and the fact that a police officer responsible for carrying out more than 440 such killings was hailed as a hero would be equally welcome.

24. **Ms. Esseneme**, noting that the Committee had received reports of many girls between the ages of 6 and 16 years, from one ethnic group in particular, being kidnapped and forced to marry their captors, said that she would be grateful for further information, including dates, on the five such cases mentioned by the head of delegation.

25. **Ms. Boker-Wilson** (Country Task Force) asked whether the State party intended to bring its legislation into line with the Convention by ensuring that it explicitly encompassed all prohibited forms of discrimination and what steps were being taken to disseminate the new standard operating procedure regarding blasphemy laws among the population, in particular minority communities.

26. **Ms. Tlakula**, commending the State party for the systematic way in which it had addressed the Committee's recommendations and for the National Commission for Human Rights having obtained A status, said that she would welcome an update on the National Interfaith Harmony Policy.

27. **A representative of Pakistan** said that government efforts to protect minorities included the creation of a task force to develop strategies for religious tolerance and the establishment of the district-level Interfaith Harmony Committees. In Sindh Province, the Committees resolved faith-related disputes and prevented illegal encroachment on places of worship. In Punjab Province, meanwhile, minority rights protection units had been introduced at police stations in all areas with significant minority populations. The Minority Affairs Department of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province held conferences, events and workshops to promote religious tolerance and interfaith harmony and had set up a help desk

to address complaints from members of minorities and allocate grants to minority communities.

28. Forced conversion and marriage remained a high priority for all levels of government. A number of legislative developments, including the adoption of the Sindh Child Marriages Restraint Act, the Punjab Sikh Anand Karaj Marriage Act and the Hindu Marriage Act, had also taken place at the provincial level to better protect and uphold the rights of minorities and prevent child or forced marriages. Furthermore, there were 95 specialized gender-based violence courts across the country, which provided rapid redress. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, special mobile courts had been set up to hear cases of domestic violence, child marriage and other offences against women and girls and provide legal information and counselling. In Punjab Province, special protection measures, such as in-camera trials and video testimony, had been instituted to ensure that victims and witnesses did not have to face the accused.

29. A number of helplines had also been established to provide women with free legal advice and referral services. Those efforts, which were supported by a variety of stakeholders, including religious leaders and civil society, were proving effective. In 2023, no cases of forced conversion or marriage had been registered in the Provinces of Punjab or Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, while five cases had been registered in Sindh.

30. In 2020, the Federal Shariat Court had ruled that the prerogative to set the minimum age of marriage lay with the State. Then, in 2022, the Islamabad High Court had ruled that marriage of children under the age of 18 years was unlawful and, where it had occurred, the marriage contract was void.

31. Where the police were reluctant to register a case under the Penal Code, legal action against perpetrators of forced marriage could be brought by justices of the peace, the National Commission on the Status of Women, the National Commission on the Rights of Child or the National Commission for Human Rights. Consultations were under way to build consensus around amending the Child Marriage Restraint Act 1929 to introduce 18 years as the minimum age of marriage.

32. Shelters had been set up in all the provinces to provide support for women victims of violence. Lastly, a gender protection unit had been established at the Islamabad Police Facilitation Centre in May 2021 to encourage women victims of sexual harassment, rape, bonded labour and forced marriage to report offences to a trained team of women police officers, legal professionals, psychologists and medical practitioners.

33. **A representative of Pakistan** said that, in the event of offences considered cognizable under the country's Criminal Procedure Code, the police were authorized to proceed with arrests, the cases were registered as first information reports and inspectors or sub-inspectors proceeded with an investigation forthwith. If sufficient evidence existed, the case was then referred to the courts by means of a *challan*. Since the introduction of section 156A of the Code, blasphemy had been treated as a specially reported case, to be handled only by very senior officers, who decided whether to proceed with prosecution on the basis of the evidence. If cases of blasphemy were referred to the prosecution service, it was mandatory for the service to authorize prosecution.

34. The National Commission for Human Rights had set up an exclusive helpline to receive complaints relating to marriage, including child marriage. The Government had enacted specific laws to govern marriages concluded in the Christian, Hindu and Sikh communities, and nearly all laws prohibited marriage under the age of 18. Controversial cases involving early marriage were heard in court and often arose in contexts of intermarriage between the various religious and ethnic communities.

35. The Constitution called for safeguarding the legitimate interests of minorities and backward and depressed classes. That provision was not limited to the protection of religious minorities; it excluded no sections of the population. The Government had constantly worked to address the problem of the low conviction rate, inter alia by carrying out training for judges, prosecutors and police officers.

36. **A representative of Pakistan** said that, although the list of proscribed organizations was maintained by the National Counter Terrorism Authority, its focus was broad, also

covering organizations and individuals that assisted in incitement of hatred on religious, sectarian or ethnic grounds. There were currently 81 organizations on the list. Organizations that were not proscribed but were considered by the federal authorities to require observation were kept on a watch list, which currently contained the names of four organizations. In the previous three years, the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority had worked with social media companies to remove content advocating hatred against specific individuals. The number of removal requests had declined from about 440 to around 240 in that time, and the percentage of requests on which action had been taken had more than doubled. The delegation would present further information to the Committee on numerous cases involving the implementation of the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act of 2016 and, in the provinces, of legislation governing loudspeakers.

37. **A representative of Pakistan** said that, when a person filed a complaint with the police against another person, the police registered a first information report. Then, within 17 days of that report being registered, a *challan*, or final report, was issued to transfer the case to court. Both houses of the parliament had passed laws establishing the minimum age for marriage at 18 years.

The meeting was suspended at 4.30 p.m. and resumed at 4.40 p.m.

38. **Ms. Boker-Wilson**, noting that the Sheedi community in Pakistan was composed of descendants of persons brought to the country from East Africa as slaves, said that the Committee would like to find out whether the State party included racial or ethnic variables of self-identification, such as African descent or skin tone, in its surveys and censuses. Sheedi people, and Sheedi women in particular, reportedly continued to face widespread discrimination in the labour market and were often forced to live in ghettos. She invited the delegation to provide information on their situation and on the number, nature and outcomes of cases where they had suffered discrimination.

39. She observed that the 2019 census on ethnic or linguistic minorities lacked information on ethnic minorities such as Pashtuns and on religious minorities such as Ahmadis, Sikhs, Parsis, Zikris or Bahais, who had been included in previous censuses. Did the 2019 census provide for self-identification, beyond a set of pre-determined response options?

40. The Committee would like to receive disaggregated information on non-nationals, including migrants, refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless persons. She noted that the disaggregation in the Pakistan Social and Living Standard Measurement Survey was insufficient to allow the Government to resolve the problems faced by minority groups. What steps had been taken to collect and evaluate socioeconomic indicators to develop evidence-based policies?

41. The Committee would appreciate it if the delegation could provide statistical data on the number and race, colour and ethnicity of members of minorities who held positions in the parliament and the provincial governments. It would be of interest to hear the delegation's views on reports of segregation of members of the Ahmadi, Hazara and Dalit communities and the qualification of Qadianis, including Ahmadis, as non-Muslims. The Committee had received reports that Ahmadis were required to register separately for elections and to declare that they were not Muslim. Did the Government plan to repeal laws providing for separate electorates for religious minorities? What measures had it considered to make sure that minority voters had equal opportunities to vote and to enable candidates from ethnic minority groups to participate in politics?

42. The Committee had received reports of discriminatory practices in the labour market that marginalized minority communities, for example, by limiting opportunities for Christians to work by leaving posts such as sanitation jobs open only to non-Muslims. It had also learned of instances where qualified non-Muslims had been denied employment in the federal administration and relegated to sanitation work. Had the State party taken action to address such discriminatory practices?

43. While, under the federal quota policy adopted in 2003, 5 per cent of government positions should be reserved for members of minorities, it appeared that the actual proportion of jobs held was much lower, with the overwhelming majority being on low pay grades. The

Committee would like to hear about steps taken to increase the number of persons from minority groups qualified to meet eligibility criteria for higher-level government jobs.

44. The delegation was invited to provide updated information on the status of the Balochistan Forced and Bonded Labour (Abolition) Act, on the number of out-of-school children identified during surveys and subsequently enrolled in school and on the number and outcomes of bonded-labour cases involving members of minority groups. The Committee appreciated the information on measures taken to address child bonded labour and would welcome similar information on steps taken to prevent or target adult bonded labour.

45. She was concerned about reports of widespread protests and unrest currently taking place in Balochistan, where the Baloch Yakjehti Committee had called for the release of detained protesters and an undeclared curfew had been put in place in and around Gwadar. Since 2004 there had reportedly been some 7,000 cases of enforced disappearance. What measures had the Government taken to punish the perpetrators?

46. In the light of reports of harassment of members of the Hazara minority at checkpoints in Balochistan Province that had been set up to protect that very community, she would welcome information on any complaints received by the Government and the steps it had taken to address the situation.

47. **A representative of Pakistan** said that there was zero tolerance of racial discrimination or profiling of persons of Baloch ethnicity in any part of Pakistan and that the Government attached a great deal of importance to filling the development gap between Balochistan and other parts of the country. Balochistan itself was a vast province with a great deal of socioeconomic and ethnic diversity and a large number of political parties. Its location, geography and international border made it difficult to prevent interference from outside the country, and it had been the site of terrorist attacks against local leaders, security forces, foreign investors and workers and ethnic minority groups, including the Hazaras.

48. The Pakistan Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances carried out its work in complete independence and corresponded regularly with the Human Rights Council's Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances. The Commission had resolved a number of cases in recent years. In addition, the Government had recently announced a decision to provide some 5 million Pakistan rupees to the families of missing persons.

49. The rights to freedom of expression, assembly and peaceful protest were upheld by the authorities at the federal and provincial levels. Action had recently been taken in Gwadar to prevent a group from the Baloch Yakjehti Committee from becoming violent during a demonstration, as extremists had set fire to a government office, brandished firearms and chanted slogans inciting violence. On 28 July 2024, the Committee had held a demonstration where unrest had resulted in three deaths and injuries to 16 people.

50. Action had been taken to implement the Committee's recommendations following its previous review of Pakistan in 2016, notably with regard to the collection of statistical data. A population and housing census, conducted in 2023, had produced information about the country's 241 million inhabitants disaggregated by age, religion, language, nationality and literacy. Notably, the census had shown that the proportion of inhabitants who identified as Muslim had fallen slightly, from 96.47 per cent in 2017 to 96.35 per cent in 2023. Over the same period, the Hindu population had increased from 3.59 million to 3.86 million and the Christian population from 26.42 million to 33 million. The number of persons belonging to scheduled castes had also increased from 849,614 in 2017 to more than 1.3 million in 2023. They currently accounted for 0.56 per cent of the total population, and 99 per cent of them lived in Sindh Province. Also according to the census, Pakistan was currently hosting more than 3 million Afghan refugees. Despite economic shocks, climate-induced catastrophes, the debt crisis and other challenges, the gross domestic product of Pakistan had increased significantly, with strong growth in the industrial and service sectors and, in particular, the agriculture sector.

51. Minorities in Pakistan were entitled to equal treatment under the law and the Constitution, without discrimination of any kind. Moreover, the Government provided them with financial support and intervened to protect them against any reported instance of

segregation or discrimination, in particular with regard to employment, health care, education and basic services. Minorities were effectively represented in law enforcement agencies, the judiciary and academia, and the use of quotas for the allocation of posts in the public sector had recently been upheld in a landmark ruling of the Supreme Court. Furthermore, security measures had been put in place to protect certain minority communities in Punjab and Baluchistan, notably Hazaras, who had long been the target of extremist religious violence. Thanks to those measures, attacks against the Hazara community had ceased altogether over the previous three years. Members of that community were themselves involved in counter-terrorism efforts and several of them served as police officers.

52. The National Action Plan developed in 2014 to counter terrorism and extremism had been revised in 2021. The revised Plan included provisions intended to prevent the financing of terrorism and to keep extremist groups under surveillance. Seventy-eight such groups had so far been proscribed under anti-terrorism legislation. Structures to counter terrorism had been created at the federal level and placed under the effective control of the National Counter Terrorism Authority, and special prosecutors have been assigned to deal with terrorism cases. Moreover, new laws had been passed and existing ones amended with a view to curbing intolerant and extremist trends in society and to ensuring the effective prosecution of terrorists.

53. **Ms. Boker-Wilson** said that she specifically wished to know about minorities who had featured in earlier population censuses but who appeared to have been excluded from the 2019 census.

54. **Ms. Tlakula** said that she looked forward to receiving more information on the steps being taken to end discrimination against scheduled castes such as Dalits. In particular, she wished to know about any measures taken to prevent bonded labour among that group and details about any investigations and prosecutions conducted in that regard.

55. **Ms. Chung** said that the Dalit community in Pakistan faced multiple forms of discrimination. Extreme stigma and prejudice often trapped Dalits in poverty and compelled them into forced labour. Reports also pointed to very high levels of illiteracy, particularly among Dalit women. In fact, concerns about abduction for forced marriage or prostitution meant that many Dalit families did not send their girls to school at all. In the light of that situation, she hoped the delegation could explain why the State party seemed not to recognize the caste-based discrimination faced by the Dalit community in the country.

56. **Mr. Diaby** said that he wished to know what investigations had been conducted into the destruction of places of worship of minority groups in 2023, and whether the victims had received any reparation. The Committee had received troubling reports concerning the voting rights of the Ahmadi community, and he would appreciate assurances that all minorities had equal political rights under the law. He hoped that the delegation could provide information about the current size of the Sheedi community and explain what steps were being taken to reduce its invisibility. The Committee had also heard of cases where members of minority communities had allegedly been expelled from their land without compensation, and he wondered if the delegation could confirm the truth of those claims. If they were true, the delegation should explain the reasons behind such expulsions and whether the prior and informed consent of the communities involved had been sought.

57. **A representative of Pakistan** said that the Sheedi community was of East African origin and had been in Pakistan for around 200 years, residing mostly in the southern part of the country. They were predominantly Muslims and suffered no religious or ethnic discrimination. In fact, a female member of the Sheedi community had been elected as a member of the Sindh provincial parliament in 2018. The federal and local authorities were committed to restoring the annual cultural festival at the Mangho Pir shrine, which had been suspended some years previously following a violent incident there.

58. All groups, including Dalits, had an equal right to education, and discrimination on grounds of caste was explicitly forbidden under the Constitution. The same principle was enshrined in labour legislation, which prohibited any form of wage discrimination on grounds of gender, caste or colour. Christians and members of other minority communities held or had held high-ranking positions in the military and the judiciary. The Constitution also prohibited slavery and bonded labour, and the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act of

1992 was duly enforced throughout the country. Thousands of labour inspections had been carried out under the Act, and 982 prosecutions had been brought. All four of the country's provinces and the Islamabad Capital Territory had recently introduced legislation for the protection of home-based workers. The Government had taken action to improve the lot of sanitation workers, whose cause had also been taken up by the National Commission on Human Rights.

59. **A representative of Pakistan** said that 11,467 security personnel were assigned to protect Hindu temples, Sikh temples, Christian churches and other places of worship of minorities, including those of the Ahmadi community. Security was, of course, reinforced during religious festivals. Details about recent security incidents and the reparations given would be provided in writing. The Government was aware of certain issues surrounding the security of the Ahmadi community – who were recognized as a non-Muslim minority – and had therefore acted to safeguard the rights of its members. It was important to note that members of minorities – over and above the 5 per cent quota of public service posts that was reserved for them – could also compete on an equal footing for the posts available on merit via open competitive examinations. In fact, several high-ranking positions in the diplomatic service were currently held by members of minorities, including an ambassador from the Ahmadi community.

60. **A representative of Pakistan** said that the Constitution made specific provision for just and humane working conditions, and there was no constitutional, legal or systemic barrier preventing a member of any community from practising any lawful professional or business activity. Since the previous review in 2016, all four provinces and the Capital Territory had enacted laws related to the right to work, particularly for workers from vulnerable sectors of society.

61. At the international level, Pakistan cooperated with the International Labour Organization (ILO) on the decent work country programme. The current programme, which covered the period 2023–2027, had a section dedicated to the protection of workers from vulnerable communities. It also focused on those employed in high-risk professions, such as sanitation workers and workers in brick kilns. Another area of engagement with ILO concerned the right to form trade unions, which was enshrined in the ILO Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87), and in the Pakistani 2012 Industrial Relations Act. Minorities were well represented on trade unions including, for example, a sanitation workers' union in Lahore which had more than 5,000 Christian and Dalit members, an agricultural workers' union in the Province of Sindh and a workers' union in the Capital Territory which included both Christians and Muslims. The latter ran special schemes such as residential colonies for Christian employees and it annually financed hajj for Muslim workers and visits to the Vatican for Christian workers.

62. **A representative of Pakistan** said that minorities could freely stand for elected office, and there were minority members in all the provincial parliaments of Pakistan. In addition, they had 4 reserved seats in the Senate and 10 in the National Assembly. It was not true – indeed, it was prohibited under the Constitution – that certain jobs were reserved for persons of a particular religion or caste. In his own province of Punjab, many Muslims were employed as sanitation workers while there were numerous Christian police officers, teachers and academics.

The meeting rose at 5.55 p.m.