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political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by Jubilee Campaign, 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.

[3 February 2025]

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



Preventing the Coerced Faith Conversions of Minor Minority Girls in Pakistan

Jubilee Campaign, an organization with special consultative status under ECOSOC, submits this written statement to highlight the alarming issue of coerced faith conversions of minor girls from religious minority communities in Pakistan. This submission underscores the severe violations of religious freedom and human rights through case studies and legal analysis, illustrating the urgent need for legislative and policy interventions to prevent these abuses.

General Landscape of Pakistan's Violations of the Child's Right to Religious Freedom

Religious freedom is a fundamental human right, enshrined in international legal frameworks. However, in Pakistan, this right is systematically denied to minority communities, particularly minor girls, who are abducted, forcibly converted to Islam, and coerced into marriage. This practice represents a grave form of gender-based violence, intersecting with issues of child rights violations, sexual exploitation, and institutionalized discrimination against religious minorities.

Forced religious conversion is an egregious violation of human rights and an affront to religious freedom. While "forced conversion" itself is not explicitly criminalized in Pakistan, offenses such as abduction, child marriage, forced marriage, and sexual violence are recognized under the law. However, weak enforcement, judicial biases, and societal pressures enable perpetrators to act with impunity. These violations deprive victims of their right to education, personal development, and employment, robbing them of a dignified future.

Despite constitutional guarantees of religious freedom, Pakistani authorities have consistently failed to address complaints of forced conversions. Multiple legislative efforts aimed at introducing safeguards against forced conversions have been obstructed, largely due to opposition from the Council of Islamic Ideology, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and various religious-political groups. These entities argue that laws against forced conversions infringe upon the right of Muslims to convert non-Muslims, thereby perpetuating systemic discrimination against minorities.

Pakistani authorities frequently deny the existence of forced conversions, claiming that all conversions to Islam are voluntary. However, documented evidence contradicts these assertions. According to Jubilee Campaign's study, *Conversion by Coercion*, at least 176 Christian girls and women were forcibly converted and forcibly married in Pakistan between January 2019 and December 2024. Alarming, over 75% of these victims were subjected to violence before reaching the age of 18.

Relevant Case Studies

Numerous cases illustrate the distressing pattern of abduction, forced conversion, and child marriage among minority girls: In November 2023, Sh. R., a Christian minor girl from Sheikhpura, was abducted, forcibly converted to Islam, and forcibly married to a middle-aged Muslim man. She remains in the perpetrator's custody. In June 2024, A. Kh., a minor girl from Islamabad, was abducted, forcibly converted, and forcibly married to a Muslim man. Despite her family's appeals, the police have failed to recover her. In January 2025, A. G., a minor girl from Okara, was abducted, forcibly converted, and forcibly married to a middle-aged Muslim man. Authorities have yet to secure her release.

Despite clear evidence of coercion, authorities have failed to reunite victims with their families or prosecute the perpetrators, reflecting systemic indifference to the plight of minority girls. The judiciary, too, has repeatedly failed to ensure justice due to external pressures and institutional biases.

Judicial and Institutional Barriers

Perpetrators exploit legal loopholes to evade accountability. They frequently falsify documents to misrepresent victims as adults in marriage records. Religious and political entities facilitate these violations by issuing fraudulent conversion certificates.

Police officers often exhibit bias, aligning with influential figures to frame child marriages as consensual. In court, cases involving forced conversions are often dismissed in favor of perpetrators, with judges citing interpretations of Islamic jurisprudence that deem girls who have reached puberty as eligible for marriage. These rulings effectively enable forced conversions and marriages, leaving victims with no legal recourse.

Recommendations to the Human Rights Council

Jubilee Campaign urges the Human Rights Council to call upon the Government of Pakistan to address the grave misuse of religious laws and protect minority rights. The international community should:

- Hold Pakistan accountable for its international human rights obligations and press for concrete actions to prevent coerced religious conversions.
- Encourage legal and policy reforms to eliminate religious discrimination and introduce safeguards against forced conversions.
- Engage in follow-up interventions to assess Pakistan's progress in implementing legal protections and upholding commitments to religious freedom.

Recommendations to the Government of Pakistan

To safeguard fundamental freedoms and minority rights, the Government of Pakistan must:

- Implement concrete measures to protect the freedom of all individuals to adopt a religion or belief of their choice, including enhancing law enforcement's capacity to prevent and respond to forced religious conversions, particularly among children and religious minorities.
- Enact legislation that explicitly criminalizes coerced religious conversions, ensuring stringent penalties for perpetrators and those complicit in such acts. Establish legal safeguards to prevent misuse of religious conversion claims in cases involving minority girls.
- Conduct independent, impartial, and transparent investigations into cases of abduction, forced religious conversions, and child marriages involving minority girls. Authorities must thoroughly examine evidence of coercion, threats, or violence and ensure that perpetrators face strict legal consequences without political or religious interference.
- Establish a Parliamentary Committee to introduce preventive legislation to criminalize forced faith conversions linked to marriage through judicial oversight.
- Enforce existing legal safeguards against child and forced marriages, ensuring that police, administrative, and judicial officers bring perpetrators and abettors involved in forced faith conversions to justice.
- Amend marriage laws to standardize the legal age for marriage at 18 years for both girls and boys and introduce punitive measures against violators facilitating child marriages, giving regard to Federal Shariat Courts rulings, which affirmed that setting a marriage age is not un-Islamic. Ensure that bills regarding child marriage restraint acts tabled in Senate, National Assembly, and provincial assemblies of Punjab, Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, are enacted without further delay.

Conclusion

The coerced religious conversion of minor girls from religious minority communities represents a severe violation of human rights and religious freedom. The systemic failure of Pakistani authorities to protect minority girls from abduction, forced marriage, and sexual violence fosters an environment of fear, discrimination, and injustice. Immediate and decisive action is required to prevent these violations and uphold the fundamental rights of religious minorities. The international community, particularly the Human Rights Council, must intensify its advocacy and monitoring efforts to ensure accountability and legal reforms in Pakistan.
