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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 PANAFRICA, 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.

[17 August 2021]

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



Religious and Ethnic Minorities Rights in Pakistan

Since the formation of Pakistan which happened in 1947 as a result of trifurcation of the Indian subcontinent. East and West Pakistan what the two federating units of this newly born Islamic Republic. The religious and ethnic minorities off Pakistan over the last 75 years has faced significant and systematic modularisation through various constitutional and other military amendments to push them out of the equation. The state has also done very little to ensure that equal rights such as freedom of speech expression religion an life of small minority population of the country is not only preserved but also nurtured to obtain full potential. Pakistan has had many decades of military rule and all of the dictators had ensured that the minorities have been deliberately made week.

As Pakistan is an Islamic Republic it has a dominantly overwhelming Muslim majority and the minorities make up a very tiny minute percentage of the population. It is estimated that almost 96% of the country practise Islam and the remaining 4% belongs to a multitude of different religions race ethnicity. Hindus and Christians are probably the largest fractions off this minority also there are other different sects which fall under this category. It is to be noted here that these figures itself are self-evidence of the fact that the minorities have eroded over the last 75 years and have a very limited say in the social and political state of affairs in the country. The constitution of Pakistan also has adopted and resolution known as the infamous Objectives Resolution which prevents any of the minorities to hold the highest office of the state.

Among other issues, the major dilemmas currently faced by Pakistani minorities are threats of persecution, forced conversions along with religious violence. On May 13, 2015, a group of six unnamed assailants targeted a bus carrying Pakistanis belonging to the Ismailia community – a minority Shia sect. The attack resulted in deaths of 43 civilians, whereas the assailants escaped unscathed. This specific example is not an anomaly or an exception however probably this is justification to the order of the day in the Islamic Republic unfortunately. Attacks like this over the past few decades with extremist intent an military wing of various non-governmental agencies and sects have quadrupled. They generally target Hindus, Christians, Hazaras, Ahmedis and Isamilis communities amongst a few. The situation has particularly deteriorated over the past few decades in which minority groups are subjected to mob violence in which angry rural youth are provoked and encouraged to attack these communities. The law enforcement agencies are generally mute spectators just playing no role whatsoever in order to ensure safety and security of the citizens.

The Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights may somehow define the term suitably: “A group of citizens of a state, consisting of a numerical minority and in a non-dominant position in that state, endowed with ethnic, religious, or linguistic characteristics which differ from those of the majority of the population, having a sense of solidarity with one another, motivated, if not implicitly, by a collective will to survive and whose aim is to achieve equality with the majority in fact and in law.

Military dictators in the past had enforced collection of additional tax for non-Muslims in the entire country known as Zakat. This ensured safety to the minorities to go about their business in the Islamic Republic a concept totally unacceptable in today's days and age by any standards. Till date, there have been more than 700 cases registered against minorities in relation to blasphemy offences, making up half of the total blasphemy related cases. Pakistan is among the many United Nations member states to have signed the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). But even having signed and ratified the ICCPR, the country has failed to ensure political and civil rights of the minorities. Moreover, it is also argued that most of the persecution and violence against the minorities is implicitly state sanctioned and thus goes unchecked.

As per a recent survey by the institute of economics and peace Pakistan has ranked third in the global terrorism index and the country's terror network constantly wage violence against religious minorities inside the country. It is also believed the recent wave of Talibanization inside Pakistan has sport major threat to the communities who are particularly at risk. Lashkar e Jhangvi (LeJ) a banned militant outfit is mostly responsible for attacks on Shias at large whereas Jundullah has been involved in persecution of Hazara Shias.

Many members of minority communities particularly Hindus, are leaving for safer lands. Between January 2013 and June 2014, 3,753 Pakistanis from minority groups, especially Hindus, surrendered their passports and obtained long-term visas for India. The situation for Christians is also dire. A number of prominent anti Christians attacks in the past 15 years including an attack on a Christian Church in Murree in 2002 killing 7, execution of 7 Christian workers in a welfare organisation in Karachi in September 2002, two minor girls, aged two and a half and seven, raped in Lahore in 2004, Samuel Masih being the seventh person to be murdered on conviction of blasphemy in 2004, a Christian social worker and his driver killed in Peshawar in 2005, a Christian stonemason severely beaten by a mob in 2006 for drinking out of a communal glass, a young Christian man gang raped by 30 men for refusing to convert to Islam and in 2009 a mob burning down more than 40 homes in Gojra, among other incidents.

In Sindh, where the Hindu minority is based, the incidents of persecution are far less compared to those against Christians in Punjab. This is because Punjab is more radicalised than Sindh. Two months after Salman Taseer was shot, Pakistan's only Christian minister was also shot dead outside his house in Islamabad for campaigning for free speech.

Forced marriages and conversions are a key evil tool which is repeatedly used to target the Hindu minority community especially in Sindh Pakistan. The movement for solidarity and peace in a report explains that the forced conversions he's probably one of the top three high ranking grievances in the minority community. According to the Human Rights Watch it is estimated that as high as 25 forced conversions kidnapping and marriages I perpetrated against the Hindu community in sent on a monthly basis. Similar atrocities of forced conversions and marriages a targeted towards the Christian community in the Punjab the heartland region of Pakistan. In maximum of the cases the girls are forced to convert and marry who are minors thus unable to provide an informed consent for such life changing decision's.

Majority of cases the minor girls are forced to physical and sexual abuse prior to them converting and marrying off their abuser in a grand ceremony which is celebrated throughout social media and other channels invigorating the celebration of accepting Islam. One prominent example of such cases was when A.K., aged 12, was kidnapped and consequently forced into conversion and marriage. K.'s parents and Hindu community elders from Sukkur, K.'s hometown, were of the view that at the age of 12, K was a minor and thus could not wilfully marry and convert to another religion.

It is also to be noted here that many minority community members have no other option but to convert in order to access better jobs and other economic benefits which they are unable in their current believe of faith. The rule of law enforcing agencies as discussed earlier are off to provide pure impunity to the perpetrators and turn a wind fully blind eye to this heinous atrocities going on, a daily phenomenon.

Afghan Soviet war (1979-1989) and the War on Terror (2001- present) have helped in fermenting an extremist narrative in the country. Extremist education is perpetrated two young minds through the well organised recruiting grounds of future fighters. Many Pakistani citizens have been internally displaced for decades. In 2001, it was reported that hundreds of Hindus had to flee their homes due to rioting and violence by Muslim mobs in their neighbourhoods. Within a year, almost 5,000 Hindus had to leave their homes in Lasbela to find refuge elsewhere. Additionally, as recently as a few days ago, over a hundred Hindus have fled to India and are seeking refugee status.

It calls for a central collective consciousness to enforce the basic rights of minorities living in Pakistan to be upheld and the democratic world especially must play an active role in order to help support and facilitate their existence. Failing which we would have let down a significant percentage of the citizens of Pakistan who will be regularly marginalised, oppressed and abused for simply following a different sect / religion.

The fundamental source of a country's wealth is its diversity and pluralism.