



# General Assembly

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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.



## **Forced Conversions of Minorities and State Accountability**

As the curtains drew to a close on the tumultuous year of 2023, the closing chapter revealed a disheartening narrative that encapsulated the enduring struggles faced by religious minorities in Pakistan. For decades, these communities have grappled with an arduous quest for their basic rights, yearning for acknowledgment, respect, and the preservation of their distinct identities. However, the stark reality of their circumstances was further marred by Pakistan's persistent denial – a refusal to acknowledge the harsh truths surrounding forced conversions and marriages, which has only served to exacerbate an already precarious situation.

Therefore it is pertinent to look into the multifaceted layers of the deep-rooted crisis of forced conversions in Pakistan, unraveling the intricacies that define the struggles of religious minorities within the nation. Pakistan's recurrent denial of the gravity of forced conversions and marriages emerges as a central theme, casting a shadow over the veracity of the issue and hindering meaningful progress towards a resolution.

In the wake of a comprehensive inquiry conducted by the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Pakistani Minorities, a distressing revelation has come to light, underscoring the gravity of forced conversions as a pervasive human rights crisis. The findings of this inquiry paint a stark picture: an estimated 1,000 girls, ranging in age from 12 to 25 and hailing from minority communities, are subjected to forced conversions to Islam annually. What makes this trend even more alarming is the subsequent coerced marriages to their abductors, perpetuating a deeply disturbing pattern that has remained unchecked by the government's intervention. The APPG's report, characterizing this situation as "vulnerable," serves as an emphatic declaration of the severity of the crisis, demanding urgent attention and decisive action to stem the tide of this egregious violation of human rights.

## **Government Failures in Enforcing Legislative Measures**

As the specter of forced conversions and marriages looms large over Pakistan, the failures of the government in implementing critical legislative measures come to the forefront. Despite the urgency presented by the escalating crisis, legislative tools such as the Child Marriage Restraint Act 1929 and the Sindh Child Marriage Restraint Act 2013 have not witnessed effective enforcement. These acts were envisioned as bulwarks against the rising tide of forced conversions, particularly targeting minors. However, the stark reality reveals a systemic breakdown, with the legal minimum age of marriage remaining a mere suggestion rather than a steadfast rule.

The Child Marriage Restraint Act 1929, a cornerstone in the legal framework, holds the potential to act as a deterrent against early and forced marriages. Similarly, the Sindh Child Marriage Restraint Act 2013, a regional enactment with the specific aim of raising the minimum age of marriage in Sindh province, represents a step towards localized solutions to a pervasive problem. Nevertheless, the mere existence of these legislative instruments falls short when it comes to their practical implementation.

The consequences of this legislative neglect reverberate across minority communities, exposing them to the ongoing threat of forced conversions. The very essence of these laws, designed to shield vulnerable individuals from exploitation, loses its potency in the absence of rigorous enforcement. The government's inaction not only undermines the rights of religious minorities but also fosters an environment where perpetrators operate with impunity.

The unsettling role of Islamic clerics and police in the forced conversion crisis unfolds a disturbing narrative where clerics involved in the conversion process often neglect to investigate the nature of the conversion or the age of the girl. A glaring example is the A.R. case, where a 13-year-old girl reportedly embraced Islam to marry a 40-year-old man, revealing the flawed conversion processes. Compounding the issue, the police frequently turn a blind eye to reports of abduction, forced conversion, or marriage, fostering impunity for perpetrators and leaving victims vulnerable throughout the trial process.

The impact on victims and their families is profound, as forced conversions act as a ticking time bomb, manifesting in emotional breakdowns, self-harm, or extreme anxiety.

The justice system's inefficacy, particularly its discriminatory stance towards women from religious minorities, exacerbates the challenges faced by victims and their families, necessitating urgent reforms to safeguard human and legal rights. Economic pressures further contribute to the rise of voluntary conversions, blurring the lines between genuine choice and coercion. Proselytizing Muslim clerics and charity groups exploit the vulnerable economic conditions of impoverished minority members by offering incentives like jobs or land. The economic downturn, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, intensifies these pressures, rendering minorities, often the poorest, more susceptible to conversion. The entanglement of religious, social, and economic factors paints a harrowing picture of a crisis that demands immediate attention and comprehensive intervention to protect the rights and well-being of minority communities.

The dwindling Hindu minority in Pakistan finds itself ensnared in a web of systemic discrimination, compelling some members to contemplate conversion as a means to escape the prevailing hardships and seek improved social status and economic opportunities. The economic challenges faced by this community have become a driving force behind voluntary conversions, as individuals harbor hopes of securing financial support from affluent Muslims or Islamic charities. This phenomenon not only underscores the vulnerability of the Hindu minority but also sheds light on the multifaceted factors influencing their decisions. The diminishing Hindu population in Pakistan is emblematic of a longstanding trend, wherein the community's share plummeted to a mere 1.6 percent of the total population in 1998, starkly contrasting with the 20.5 percent it constituted in 1947. This demographic shift paints a poignant picture of the struggles faced by religious minorities in the country, necessitating a critical examination of the underlying causes and a concerted effort to address their plight comprehensively.

Pakistan's track record on international obligations, particularly regarding the right to freedom of religion, stands in stark contradiction to its commitments as a signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This foundational document explicitly outlines the right of individuals to choose and change their religion without any form of coercion. However, Pakistan has consistently faltered in upholding this fundamental human right, especially evident in the persistent issue of forced conversions. Despite resonating calls from the international community and various human rights organizations urging Pakistan to take decisive action against forced conversions, the government's response has been characterized by apathy and a conspicuous lack of interest in safeguarding the rights and well-being of minority girls and women. This disconcerting scenario raises serious questions about Pakistan's commitment to the principles enshrined in international human rights frameworks and underscores the urgent need for a paradigm shift in addressing the rampant human rights violations faced by religious minorities within its borders.

Pakistan's persistent failures in addressing forced conversions demand urgent attention. The government must take immediate and comprehensive action to implement and strengthen legislation, protect religious minorities, and fulfill its international obligations. The state's accountability is paramount in ending the ongoing human rights catastrophe and ensuring the safety, respect, and dignity of minority communities in Pakistan.

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