

January 12, 2017

His Excellency Syed Murad Ali Shah  
Chief of Minister of Sindh  
Sindh Secretariat  
Karachi, Sindh, Pakistan  
(sent via email to [cs.sindh@sindh.gov.pk](mailto:cs.sindh@sindh.gov.pk))

**Re: Urgent Action Required Against the Forced Conversion of Minorities Girls in Pakistan.**

Dear Honorable Chief Minister,

We, human and womens rights advocates, write to you to express our profound concern regarding the proposed amendments set to be applied by the Pakistan Government to the recently passed legislation, "*Sindh Criminal Law (Protection of Minorities) Bill, 2015*" of Pakistan, which currently makes it a punishable offense for anyone to force a child under 18 years of age to change their religion and enter into a marriage.

The Protection of Minorities Bill, passed unanimously in the Sindh provincial assembly, is designed to protect the rights of the girl child by prosecuting the perpetrators of this heinous crime, but is now coming under threat by extremist groups who are demanding its reversal.

Our grave concern is that the proposed amendments being considered by Sindh Government would nullify the substantive effect of the Protection of Minorities Bill, making it legal for a person to force children, using threats, violence or duress, including forced marriage, to change their religion. This would undo the years of work by human rights and women's rights organizations in their efforts to legally protect religious minority girls from forced conversions.

- Per the South Asia Partnership-Pakistan (SAP-PK), at least 1,000 girls are forcibly converted to Islam in Pakistan every year.<sup>[1]</sup>
- The Asian Human Rights Commission documents that 20-25 forced conversions are occurring every month in Sindh, Pakistan.<sup>[1]</sup> There are weekly reports of girls from the Hindu and Christian and other minority communities being kidnapped and forcibly converted, and thereafter, forcibly married to their perpetrators.
- The disappearance of these girl children and the denial of their fundamental freedom of religion has caused great anguish to the victims and their families.
- Per the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, the police, in many cases, refuse to register the First Information Reports ('FIR') Complaints, rendering the girls' families with little recourse against the assailants. In those cases, where a police report is filed, the courts' practice, has typically been to not decide

custody matters in favour of the girl's family, even when the girls are 12 or 13 years old.<sup>1</sup>

- The result has been the further isolation of minority religious groups from the public sphere, and contributed to the increasing exodus of religious minorities out of Pakistan.

Failure of the Pakistan Government to abide by the unanimously passed Protection of Minorities Bill and protect against the forced conversion of minor girls, would violate Pakistan's national and international legal obligations, including:

- a) Pakistan Constitution: Pakistan Constitution guarantees the security of life and liberty of every citizen; the inviolability of man; freedom of association; the right to free speech and expression, the right to profess, practice and propagate religion; and guarantees that all citizens are equal before law.<sup>[iii]</sup>
- b) Pakistan's Penal Code: Pakistan's Penal Code prohibits the rape and the abduction of women.
- c) International Conventions: Pakistan ratified the United Nations Convention on Rights of the Child, and the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women.
- d) Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNHR) - The UNHR guarantees the right to equality before the law and protection against discrimination; the right to life, liberty and security of person; the right to a fair and public hearing; and the right to freedom of thought and religion.<sup>[iii]</sup>

It is therefore, our humble request that you:

- Call upon the Government of Pakistan to uphold and adhere to the Protection of Minorities Bill.
- Request the Government of Pakistan follow the law, rather than succumbing to the demands of the hard-line extremist groups who are demanding the substantive provisions of the law be nullified.
- To protect the rights of the girl child from violence and harm, including the forced kidnapping, conversion and marriage of minority girls.

Thank you in anticipation of your assistance with this urgent matter. Should you require additional information about the contents of this letter, please contact Jay Kansara, Director of Government Relations of the Hindu American Foundation, at [jay@hafsite.org](mailto:jay@hafsite.org) or +1 (202) 223-8222.

Yours Sincerely,

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<sup>1</sup> Asian Human Rights Commission – Freedom of Religion Statement, 2011, documenting various forced conversion and kidnapping of minor Christian and Hindu girls in Pakistan: Statement No. AHRC-STM-159-2011 (stating: “The Justice and Peace Commission commented that “thousands of girls from minorities are kidnapped and forced into marriages (against their will)”. The Justice and Peace Commission also stated that “we are fighting against the cancer of kidnapping and forced marriages”).)

## International Organizations

- Church of Scientology
- Hindu American Foundation
- International Institute for Religious Freedom, Germany
- International Sindhi Women Organisation (ISWO), UK
- World Sindhi Congress, UK
- Christian Solidarity Worldwide, UK
- British Pakistani Christians, UK
- Universal Muslim Association of America

## Individuals

- **Lela Gilbert**  
Co-author of Persecuted: The Global Assault on Christians; author of Saturday People, Sunday People: Israel through the Eyes of a Christian Sojourner
- **Farahnaz Ispahani**  
Author, Purifying the Land of the Pure: The History of Pakistan's Religious Minorities and Global Fellow,  
Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars,  
Washington, D.C.
- **Greg Mitchell**  
President  
The Mitchell Firm  
Washington, D.C.
- **Scott Morgan**  
President  
Red Eagle Enterprises  
Washington, D.C.

## Pakistan-based Organizations

- Hare Rama Foundation - Rahim Yar Khan
- Pakistan Institute of Labor Education and Research
- REAT Network - Sindh
- Active Citizens of Pakistan - Sindh
- District Development Association of Tharparkar - Sindh
- MIRA - Marvi Institute of Research and Advocacy - Sindh
- Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network (PDSN)
- Pakistan Hindu Seva Welfare Trust, Sindh
- Pakistan Minorities Teachers Association; Shadow Organization

CC: His Excellency Mr. Jalil Abbas Jilani - Ambassador of Pakistan to the United States

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[i] [http://www.msp-pk.org/zeeshan/sindh\\_assembly\\_adopts\\_bill\\_against\\_forced\\_religious\\_conversions](http://www.msp-pk.org/zeeshan/sindh_assembly_adopts_bill_against_forced_religious_conversions)

[ii] Government of Pakistan, *The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan* (as amended 30 April 2010), available at: <http://www.infopak.gov.pk/Constitution30April2010.pdf> arts 9, 15-17, 19, 20, 25 (1).

[iii] CEDAW (n 33) arts 7, 8, 10, 18.