



UNIVERSITY OF
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Forced Conversions & Forced Marriages In Sindh, Pakistan



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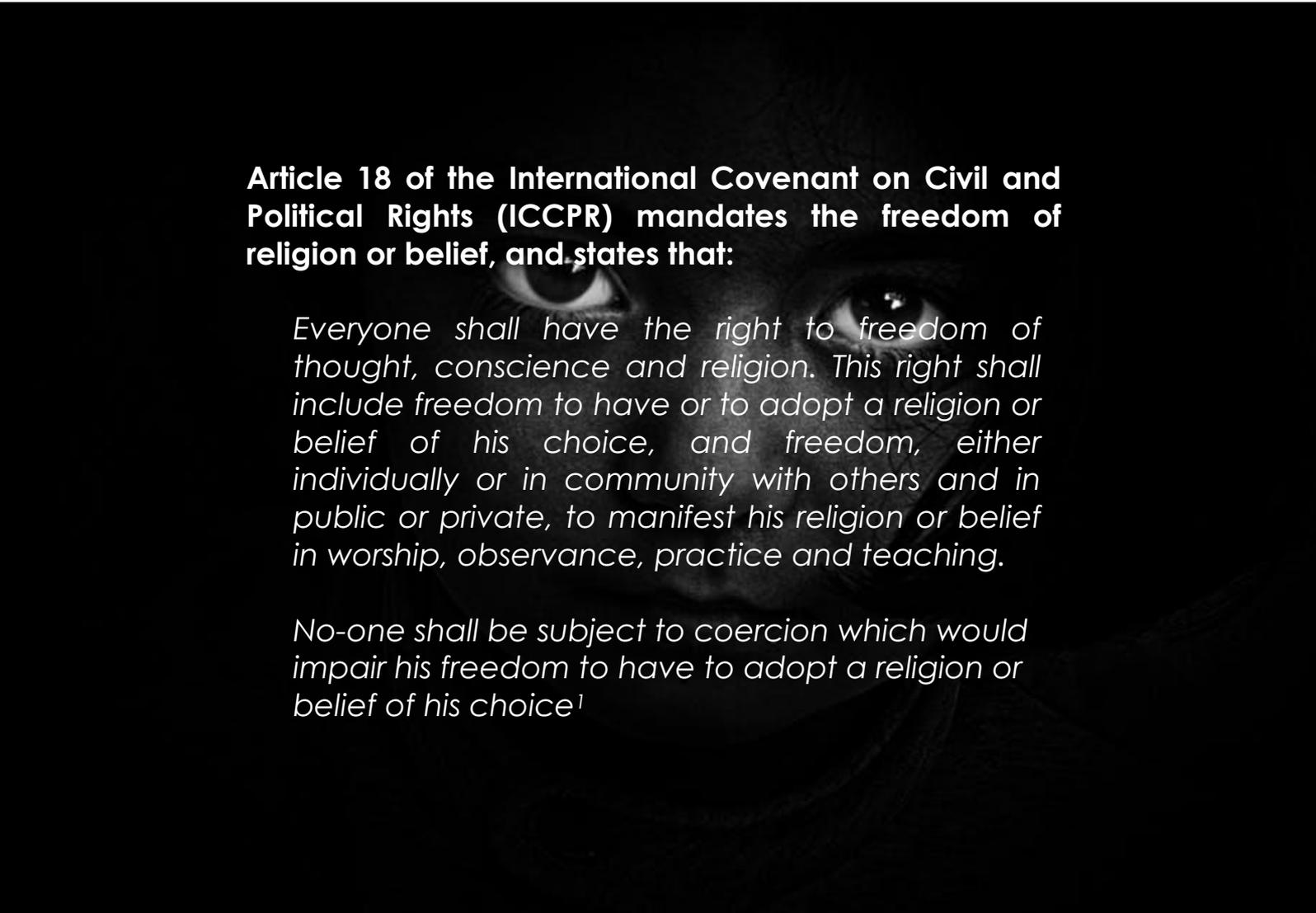
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Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) mandates the freedom of religion or belief, and states that:

Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.

No-one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have to adopt a religion or belief of his choice¹

Executive Summary

It has been estimated that 1000 women and girls from religious minorities are abducted, forcibly converted and then married off to their abductors every year (ref The Aurat Foundation and the Movement for Solidary and Peace (MSP)). Former vice-chairperson of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, Amarnath Motual, notes that 20 or more Hindu girls are abducted every month in Pakistan.² The volunteer group, *Responsible for Equality and Liberty*, also estimate that between 20 to 25 Hindu girls are forcibly converted every month.³

Pakistan has signed and ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and ratified the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), of which Article 16 confirms the right of every woman to enter into marriage 'only with their free and full consent'.⁴ Pakistan has ratified the Child Rights Convention, of which Article 14 (1) states that state parties need to respect the right of children to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.⁵

As argued by Professor Heiner Bielefeldt, the state has responsibility to provide protection against individuals or organisations that try to convert people by resorting to means of coercion or by directly exploiting situations of particular vulnerability. 'They also have a responsibility to ensure that forced conversions do not occur in the context of marriage or marriage negotiations.'⁶

However, as this report shows, Pakistan is failing to fulfil their obligations under these international treaties to protect the rights of vulnerable minorities from forced conversions and forced marriages.

The reality of forced conversions and forced marriages in Pakistan

In most cases the victim is abducted and is then subjugated to sustained emotional and physical abuse often involving threats of violence towards their loved ones.

Evidence provided by numerous NGOs, journalists and academics have shown that abductions and forced conversions are one of the most serious problems facing Hindu and Christian women and girls.

Minorities often do not receive the protection required from state institutions and lack access to justice⁷. The Human Rights Commission of

Pakistan reports that the police often turn a blind eye to reports of abduction and forced conversions thereby creating impunity for perpetrators. The police will often either refuse to record a First Information Report or falsify the information, thereby denying families the chance to take their case any further. Both the lower and higher courts of Pakistan have failed to follow proper procedures in cases that involve accusations of forced marriage and forced conversions. The judiciary are often subject to fear of reprisal from extremist elements, in other cases the judicial officers' personal beliefs influence them into accepting the claims made that the woman/girl converted on her own free will. There is often no investigation into the circumstances under which the conversion takes place and the age of the girl is often ignored. The girl/woman involved is largely left in the custody of her kidnapper throughout the trial process where she is subject to further threats to force her into denying her abduction and rape and claiming that the conversion was willing.

Many religious institutions, local mosques and seminaries fail to investigate the nature of the conversion or the age of the bride and mostly simply accept the word of the abductor. Some organisations, like Minhaj-ul-quran, routinely and as a matter of official policy, encourage the practice of converting members of minority communities by offering rewards for successful conversions. They say that it is the equivalent of *Haj-e-Akbari*, or the greatest religious duty to Muslims.⁸

The Failure of the Sindh Criminal Law (Protection of Minorities) Bill

In February 2013, following demonstrations in Karachi by political parties and civil society activists, and through pressure from civil society organisations, the Sindh government set up a three-member committee to consider legislation to stop forced conversions and forced marriages.

The resulting bill addressed many of the problems surrounding forced conversion and forced marriage as it attempted to mandate specific institutions to be responsible for preventing them as well as laying down legal guidelines for behaviour in these cases which would protect the integrity of the court process and enable victims to access justice. It also placed an age limit upon conversions to support existing legislation on age limits for legitimate marriages.

In November 2016, the Bill was passed unanimously by the Sindh Provisional Assembly. However, the Bill failed to make it into law as the then Governor, Mr. Saeed-uz-Zaman Siddiqui, returned it in January 2017. Mr. Siddiqui died shortly afterwards. The Bill was effectively blocked by the mobilisation of the Islamist groups and parties. A group of Ulema,

including the Council of Islamic Ideology (CII) met with Dr. Abdul Qayyum Soomro, the chief minister's special assistant on religious affairs, on 5 December 2016, and termed the bill against the basic principles of Islam.⁹ Religious parties in Karachi launched a campaign against the bill in order to pressurise the Sindh government into repealing it. The Jamaat-I-Islami (JI) argued that there could be no age limit on people converting to Islam. Religious Parties threatened to lay siege to the Sindh Assembly if the legislature did not repeal the bill.

Since then the Pakistan Hindu Council have attempted to get the Supreme Court to take *suo moto* (on its own authority) action against forced conversions and forced marriages. Similar bills have appeared in both the National Assembly and the Punjab Provisional Assembly but there has been little legislative movement in either case.

The Sindh government has recently announced that it will review the bill again, but it is unclear what support can be expected from the new governor, Mr. Mohammad Zubair Umar, as religious parties have shown no sign of withdrawing their opposition to the bill.¹⁰

Recommendations

- **The Sindh Criminal Law (Protection of Minorities) to become Law:** Efforts should be made to pass this bill in Sindh, the National Assembly, Punjab and across Pakistan.
- **Reform the Police System:** It is vital that faster response times are ensured in cases where abduction is reported.
- **Engage Religious Leaders:** It is clear that the role of religious leaders and groups, many of which are opposed to the act of forced conversion, is of immense importance in Pakistan.
- **Utilise social media:** There are more than 44 million social media accounts in Pakistan. Projects already exist that aim to use social media to help to create interfaith harmony and to tackle human rights abuses.
- **Reform the Judicial System:** Legal training and a system requiring greater accountability should be set up to ensure best practice in all cases.
- **Financial and Institutional Support for Minority and Human Rights Commissions:** The Pakistani government should also consider establishing Provincial Commissions for minorities who will be empowered to take up forced conversion and forced marriage cases.
- **Enhance socio-economic and cultural position of Minorities:** The government should ensure that religious minorities have equal access to education, jobs and government positions through passing anti-discrimination laws.

How UK and Commonwealth Parliamentarians can help

- **The Power of Diplomacy:** International pressure has been shown to bring changes to Pakistan's human rights policies. Pakistan's failure to secure re-election to the UN Human Rights Council in 2015 led to the Ministry of Human Rights being declared an independent ministry and the launch of their first 'Action Plan for the Improvement of Human Rights in Pakistan' in 2016. The renewal of Pakistan's GSP+ status, a preferential trade scheme with the EU conditional on respect for human rights, has been widely questioned. Legislative members in Italy have called for the GSP+ to be cancelled due to the persecution of religious minorities. The EU has also reportedly conveyed to Islamabad that renewal of GSP+ will be linked to a positive outcome for Asia Bibi, a Christian woman facing death in a blasphemy case¹¹.
The EU should retain a broader focus on the plight of religious minorities in Pakistan. The scale of the problem of forced conversions must be addressed and the Pakistani government must be reminded of its duties to protect the human rights of its citizens and encouraged to do more if it wants to maintain its GSP+ status.
- **Work with Pakistani Politicians:** It is crucial to continue to build the number of parliamentarians who are engaged in FoRB issues and their capacity to bring about effective changes is developed. Commonwealth Institutions, like the CPA, should provide additional parliamentary training and support and Commonwealth Parliamentarians should work to improve the domestic political influence of the individuals involved in FoRB.
- **Encourage UK government to take action:** UK parliamentarians should highlight the issue of forced conversions through parliamentary questions, debates and statements.
- **Questions to the UK government:** The UK has strong economic, demographic and developmental aid ties with Pakistan and as such the UK can play a key role in tackling the issue of forced marriages and conversions in Pakistan.



Sindh and Forced Marriages/Conversions

For the purposes of this report forced conversions are defined as when the threat or the use of physical, emotional or psychological violence is used to force a conversion.¹ Abduction is usually a key part of the process and the victim is then subjugated to sustained emotional and physical abuse often involving threats of violence towards their loved ones.

Under the ICCPR states have positive obligations to ensure that Covenant rights are protected by the state, not just against violations of Covenant rights by its agents, but also against acts committed by private persons or entities that would impair the enjoyment of Covenant rights.¹²

“The state has a responsibility to provide protection against individuals or organisations that try to convert people by resorting to means of coercion or by directly exploiting situations of particular vulnerability. They also have a responsibility to ensure that forced conversions do not occur in the context of marriage or marriage negotiations.”

Professor Heiner Bielefeldt, the former UN Special Rapporteur for FoRB

The Scale of the issue

Abductions and forced conversions is an issue faced by all of the minority religions across Pakistan, but in particular, is the most serious problem facing Hindu and Christian women and girls¹³. Due to deficiencies in policing and the complexity of the crime the precise number who are abducted, forcibly converted and raped is difficult to ascertain. The Aurat Foundation and the Movement for Solidary and Peace (MSP) estimate that 1000 women and girls a year are abducted, forcibly converted and then married off to their abductors. Former vice-chairperson of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, Amarnath

¹ The Initiative recognizes that conversions could also take place in scenarios where religious minorities suffer from pervasive discrimination and denial of access to employment, education, or social status. In these cases conversion to the dominant religion could be considered 'forced'. However, this report will focus on the more immediate concern of direct violence being used to force a conversion.

Motual, notes that 20 or more Hindu girls are abducted every month in Pakistan.¹⁴ The volunteer group, *Responsible for Equality And Liberty*, also estimate that between 20 to 25 Hindu girls are forcibly converted every month.¹⁵ Once kidnapped and forcibly converted they are raped, sold off, become victims of human trafficking or are forced into prostitution. The most vulnerable areas are the Thar region (Tharparkar, Mirpur Khas and Umerkot districts), Sanghar, Ghotki and Jacobabad due to the fact that there are high numbers of Hindus in these regions and they are the most economically deprived of the population.¹⁶

Socio-economic and cultural position of those vulnerable to attack

According to the International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN) the majority of the so-called Untouchable, or Scheduled Castes (Dalits) in Pakistan are Hindus in the Sindh region.¹⁷ Officially the number of Dalits is approximately 330,000 but according to IDSN the real figure may be over 2 million. Dalits and Hindus also make up a large part of Sindh's landless bonded labour¹⁸ that forms the backbone of the economy in both agriculture and brick kilns. However, the land and business owners see the profits whilst the labourers live in abject poverty due to being tied as a result of debt, their labour being used as payment. They remain tied to the land where they are forced to work as slaves with very little recourse to justice or protection from predation by their landlords. The National Assembly of Pakistan officially abolished bonded labour² in 1992 and the responsibility was devolved to Provincial Governments in 2010. However, the practice continues to thrive due to a lack of properly empowered institutions to deal with the problem and local officials remain reluctant and/or powerless to act against powerful local families. The institution is also widely accepted in a poorly educated and highly authoritarian and hierarchical rural society.¹⁹ It is estimated that there are around 40,000 to 50,000 bonded labourers in the agricultural sector alone in Sindh²⁰ and at least 2 million bonded labourers across Pakistan.²¹

The situation of bonded labour places people in a virtually powerless position vis-à-vis those who own their labour. For example, 14-year-old Jeevti from Sindh, the daughter of Hindu bonded labourers, was abducted in the middle of the night from the family's home by the landlord. She was converted to Islam and forcibly married to the landlord as his second wife because he claimed that the family owed him \$1000. The girl's mother went to the police and the courts and they did nothing to act against the influential and powerful man despite the fact that

² Also known as debt bondage or debt slavery it is the most common form of modern slavery. It occurs when a person is forced to work in order to pay off a debt.

Jeevti stated that she had no idea what was in the police documents which included an affidavit that she had converted and married of her own free will.²²

Hindus, both Dalits and non-Dalits, even if they aren't in bonded labour, are forced into low-status jobs that many Muslims refuse to take, such as sweeping streets or sewage cleaning.²³ This shows that the government has clearly failed to remove discrimination in jobs. This lack of socio-economic power perpetuates the weak position of Hindus in society.

In an effort to tackle social inequalities facing minority groups, Federal and Provincial governments have reserved a 5% quota for government positions for minorities and women since 2009 and 2010 respectively. However, the 19 June 2014 Supreme Court case found that the government had failed to effectively deliver on these promises.²⁴ This is supported by the Sami Foundation, which found in 2016 that the application of these quotas is around 2 or 3% and often lower. Furthermore, the government jobs given to religious minorities are overwhelmingly under Grades 14 and 15 (low skilled and low paying jobs such as sweepers and sanitary workers).²⁵

The destruction of community buildings and temples also leaves Hindus vulnerable due to a lack of community protection and cohesion.^{26 27} The Pakistan Hindu Seva Welfare Trust claims that there are only 20 operational temples in the country out of 428 with the remainder leased for commercial or residential purposes.²⁸

A Typical Case

MSP, Aurat Foundation, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) and South-Asia Partnership Pakistan have established that there is a typical pattern to these cases. Young girls and women, typically aged 12 to 15 years are abducted, converted to Islam and then married to the abductor or a third party. The victim's family then files a First Information Report for abduction or rape at the local police station. The abductor, on behalf on the victim, files a counter-FIR accusing the victim's family of harassing the willingly married and converted girl and of conspiring to convert the girl back to her original religion. The girl is then asked to testify in court whether she married and converted of her own free will or was abducted. In most cases the girls remain in the custody of the abductor whilst judicial proceedings proceed so she is often subject to further threats, intimidation and coercion and therefore testifies in favour of the abductor due to intimidation and threats.^{29 30}

Lack of access to justice

The HRCP has found that whilst all citizens in Pakistan face obstacles in access to justice minority religious groups face 'even greater difficulties in the pursuit of justice.'³¹ Jai Prakash Moorani, editor of the Sindhi daily has stated, "when Hindu girls are kidnapped, forcibly converted and married to Muslims, the police, government and courts all turn a blind eye."³²

Police:

*'Policing in South Asia does not command the confidence of the public because it is seen as oppressive, unfair and woefully inefficient.'*³³

HRCP has shown that police often turn a blind eye to reports of abduction and forced conversions thereby creating impunity for perpetrators. The police forces, which are overwhelming Muslim, generally sympathise with the goal of converting religious minorities. In limited instances of police intervention, local leaders exert considerable pressure to prevent any action.³⁴ Sindh province's top police official Sarjeel Kharral told Al Jazeera that the lower tier of the police force is insensitive to the discrimination faced by Hindus.

*"It's true that they don't prioritise the community without pressure from the media or civil society."*³⁵

For example, during the case of 14-year-old Jeevti from Sindh, her mother went to the Piyaro Lundh police station the police initially claimed that the girl had gone willingly but refused to allow the mother to talk to her. Only when she returned with an activist did the police take any action, however, they were friendly towards the abductor Hamid Brohi and refused to allow the activist and reporter to speak to the girl alone.³⁶

The police will often either refuse to record an FIR or falsify the information recorded on the FIR, thus denying the families involved the chance to take their case and complaints any further.³⁷ The lack of an FIR or the misrepresentation of information means that the family are unable to seek further justice in law courts, as an FIR is the vital first stage in the Criminal Procedure Code. Police are also often lethargic in attempting to recover a girl who has been abducted, thus allowing the conversion and marriage to take place.

Judiciary and Court Proceedings:

Both the lower courts and the higher courts of Pakistan have displayed bias and a lack of adherence to proper procedures in cases that involve accusations of forced marriage and forced conversions.

As the US Department of State Human Rights Report for 2016 states³⁸ the judiciary is often subjected to external influences, such as fear of reprisal and violence from extremist elements.³⁹

"In court, usually it's just four or five members of the girl's family against hundreds of armed people for the boy. In such a situation when we are unarmed and outnumbered, how can we fight our case in court?"⁴⁰ B.H. Khurana, a doctor in Jacobabad and a Hindu community leader.

In the case of a young Hindu girl named Anjali whose family reported had been kidnapped and forcibly converted 1500 people gathered outside the court and the physical threat of those present pressurised the judge to give in to the demands of the Muslim man.⁴¹

In other cases, the judicial officers' personal religious beliefs, ties to the local community and deeply entrenched patriarchal societal and cultural norms influence them into accepting on face value the claims made by the man that the woman/girl involved converted and married of their own free will. Often there is no investigation into the circumstances under which the conversion took place but the simple existence of a conversion certificate is taken as sufficient proof. Judges will also often ignore the factor of the girl's age in these cases, or the inadmissible nature of evidence given under threat.⁴²

The High Courts of Pakistan have shown a similar lack of respect for due process. In 2012 the high-profile case of Rinkle Kumari went before Pakistan's Supreme Court. The family of Rinkle Kumari had launched a petition before the Karachi High Court alleging that she had been abducted and forcibly converted and that a powerful politician supported her abduction. The husband and his friends insisted that she had voluntarily converted and married. Despite the fact that Rinkle had cried in the civil court at Ghotki and said that she wanted to go home with her parents she was sent to the Sakkar police station and the court allowed her 'husband', Mian Mithoo, to take her home.⁴³ Even though Rinkle was supposedly sent to a shelter home after her appearance in the High Court of Sindh, where she again begged to be sent home, the staff at the shelter home were intimidated into allowing Mithoo's son to meet Rinkle. When she appeared before the Supreme Court in April 2012 the Court did not take into account that her birth certificate clearly showed that she was below 16 years old and that the marriage of a child is illegal.⁴⁴ Neither Counsel was allowed to cross-examine the nature of

the conversion or the marriage.⁴⁵ The statement made by Rinkle that she wanted to go with her husband was simply accepted on faith, despite her previous statements that she wanted to go home.

The rare cases where the judiciary apply the correct procedures highlight the poor practice followed by the majority. Good practice includes sending the girl to a safe house prior to her statement in court and ordering further special investigation by the police into the circumstances surrounding the victim's conversion and marriage.

These problems are exacerbated by lengthy backlogs of cases, especially in the lower courts, driven by antiquated procedural rules, unfilled judgeships, poor case management and weak legal education.⁴⁶ In January 2015 there were more than 1.7 million cases pending in courts throughout Pakistan.⁴⁷

Role of religious institutions

The increasing number of madrassas³ and other religious institutions has an important relationship with forced conversions and forced marriages. Most religious institutions, local mosques and seminaries, fail to investigate the nature of the conversion or question the age of the bride; if they demand proof of age at all they are satisfied by a simple affidavit from a member of the locality. These institutions mostly simply accept the word of the abductor⁴⁸ and so a conversion certificate is produced by the religious institution, which is then used by the police and courts to excuse violations and to grant bail. The spread of madrassas therefore exacerbates the problem of forced conversions in Sindh; the number of madrassas in Tharparkar and Umerkot has increased from around 20 before 2000 to over 200 by 2015 with support from foreign funds, largely from the Gulf monarchies.⁴⁹

The Bharchundi Sharif Shrine is famous for conversions of young Hindu girls⁵⁰ and the Muslim cleric Mian Abdul Malik, who leads it, has stated "there's no such thing as forced conversions in Islam and in Pakistan."⁵¹ The documentary *Thrust into Heaven* names Mian Mithoo of Ghotki and Pir Sarhandi of Umerkot as two of the most powerful clerics who facilitate these conversions.⁵² Similarly, Pir Waliullah Sarhandi of the Sarhandi shrine in the Umerkot district claims to have converted thousands of Hindu girls and has claimed that "When a girl is brought before a qazi⁴ for conversion to Islam, the qazi must comply immediately. If he delays the conversion even to say his prayers, he himself becomes kafir⁵."

³ Islamic Schools

⁴ A judge in a Muslim Community

⁵ One who rejects Islam

Some organisations, like Minhaj-ul-quran, routinely and as a matter of official policy, encourage the practice of converting members of minority communities by offering rewards for successful conversions. They say that it is the equivalent of *Haj-e-Akbari*, or the greatest religious duty to Muslims.⁵³ Minhaj ul-Quran is a tightly controlled organisation led by Dr. Tahir ul-Qadri. Tahir lives in Canada and has on occasion expressed fairly liberal views whilst in the West. If he could be persuaded of the need to tackle forced conversions it would change the priorities of his organisation and help tackle the issue.

Media

The media is often silent on the problem of forced conversion. There were only 286 separate incidents of women and girls being forcibly converted in English-language newspaper reports in Pakistan between January 2012 – just before the Kumari case – and June 2017. Many cases in which influential locals and religious leaders are involved go unreported because of pressure put on the media not to report the stories.⁵⁴ Reporters are often afraid to investigate the existence or prevalence of forced conversions due to fear of attack, especially when influential members of the local community are involved.⁵⁵ They also contribute to the social milieu that encourages the process of conversion of religious minorities by celebrating conversions without inquiring into the circumstances. Television programmes will hail recent converts to Islam and conversions and sometimes televised in religious programmes, especially during the month of Ramadan.



The Attempt to Introduce the Sindh Criminal Law (Protection of Minorities) Act, 2015

Necessity and relationship to other laws

There are a number of pieces of Pakistani legislation that are intended to tackle the issue of forced marriages. However, as the subsequent analysis clarifies, the existing law has proved ineffective with substantial legal lacunae. Amongst the laws intended to criminalise forced marriages are the Pakistan Penal Code (1860), the Criminal Law (Amendment Act) 2016, the Hindu Marriage Act 2017, and the Sindh Hindu Marriage Act 2016.

Pakistan Penal Code (1860) (Act XLV of 1860), Chapter XX-A Of Offences Against Women Prohibition of forced marriage:

498B. *Whoever coerces or in any manner whatsoever compels a woman to enter into marriage shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term, which may extend to seven years or for a term which shall not be less than three years and shall also be liable to fine of five hundred thousand rupees.⁵⁶*

The **Criminal Law (Amendment Act) 2016**⁵⁷ provides an additional legal definition of woman; that 'Provided that in case of a female child as defined in the Child Marriage Restraint Act (1929)⁵⁸ (XIX of 1929), or a non-Muslim woman'. The addition of the phrase 'or a non-Muslim woman' is ambiguous and problematic. The Child Marriages Restraint Act (1929) applies to all children regardless of religion; so, to include the phrase 'or a non-Muslim woman' leads to ambiguity in the case of forced marriages of a non-Muslim female child. The Amendment is ambiguous and is open to abuse.

Further complications arise when *Sharia* (Islamic Law) principles are applied. As noted, the Child Restraint Act (1929) (XIX of 1929) is intended to prevent and restrain child marriages. On the other hand, the *Sharia*, as interpreted by the *Hanafi* School, grants authority to the *Wali*⁶ or the guardian to legitimise child marriages. The *Wali* has the power to agree to the child marriage and this power only comes to an end once the child has reached puberty.⁵⁹ Once the child has reached the age of puberty, he or she could invoke the 'option of puberty' in order to rescind

⁶ Islamic Guardian who is responsible for the bride's life before she is married

the marriage provided that the consummation of marriage has not taken place. The parallel use of *Sharia* therefore undermines the Child Marriage Restraint Act.

Joseph Francis, National Director of the Center for Legal Aid Assistance and Settlement (CLAAS), a legal aid organisation focusing on the rights of Pakistan's minorities, argues that a conversion certificate is used to over-ride marriage laws.

“When there is doubt about whether an individual has been forcibly converted and married, a conversion certificate becomes the trump card.”⁶⁰

For example in a case from June 2017 a 16-year-old Hindu girl, Revita Meghwar, was kidnapped and within hours apparently embraced Islam, was given a new name, Gulnaz, and married off to a Muslim man. Meghwar's parents filed a complaint demanding her return, whilst Meghwar's husband submitted an application to Sindh High Court to seek protection from her family and relatives. The Sindh High Court used the existence of a conversion certificate to rule that Meghwar should stay with her husband,⁶¹ over-ruling the 2013 Sindh Child Marriage restraint act, which defines a child as under the age of 18.⁶² Furthermore, due to separate laws for different religious groups, marriage contracts between Muslims over-ride those between non-Muslims. This means that even if a Hindu, Sikh or Christian is already married they can marry again after conversion, as a Muslim marriage will over-ride the existing marriage.

The **Hindu Marriages Act of 2017**⁶³ was passed by the National Assembly of Pakistan and formalises registration of Hindu marriages. Prior to this law there was no formal procedure or documentary evidence of marriage for Hindus. This meant that Hindus were at risk of being accused of adultery under the *zina*⁷ ordinances, introduced as part of the Hudood ordinances. It also meant that they had further difficulties in the case of forced marriages as they could not easily prove that they were already married. It also ends the difficulties that Hindu couples had been facing in basic activities such as opening bank accounts, applying for visas, getting national identity cards and shares of property as they lacked proof of marriage. However, there has been serious concern⁶⁴ over Section 12(iii), which allows for divorce when one party 'has ceased to be Hindu by conversion to another religion'. This means that despite the Marriage Act there is an easy legal route through the process of a forced conversion to annul marriages. This clause also incentivises forced conversions in order to legitimise abduction and forced marriages. Section 12(iii) also violates all established norms of international human

⁷ Islamic legal term referring to illegal sexual intercourse

rights law and constitutional law, such as the right enshrined in Article 18 of the ICCPR and the UDHR that changing religion should have no implication on an individual's marital position.

The **Sindh Hindu Marriage Act (2016)**⁶⁵ was again designed to provide a formal process for Hindus, Sikhs and Zoroastrians to register their marriages. As with the Hindu Marriages Act, it specifies that the bride and groom must both be over 18 and the free and active consent of both parties is required. However, like the Hindu Marriages Act of 2017, Clause 12a) iii⁶⁶ it allows for the termination of marriage by conversion thus failing to protect against the menace of forced conversion.

The campaign

The high-profile case of Rinkle Kumari in 2012 led to greater focus upon the issue. In February 2013 political parties and civil society activists demonstrated in Karachi to protest against the abduction and forced conversion of Hindu girls. The Sindh government set up a three-member committee to consider a law to stop these forced conversions and forced marriages. Many civil society organisations including the Pakistan Hindu Council, the Sindh Rural Partner Organisation, the Aurat Foundation, the Scheduled Caste Rights Movement, ActionAid Pakistan, and the National Caucuses of Minority Issues and Women's Rights were all involved in campaigning to get the legislation through the Provincial Assembly. They used advocacy, press conferences, rallies, a post card campaign and other advocacy tools to push for the Sindh government to take action. The issue was taken up jointly by the PPP and the PML-F.

The law

The Sindh Criminal Law (Protection of Minorities) Bill⁶⁷ was unanimously passed by the Sindh Assembly in November 2016. This reflects the relatively liberal nature of Sindhi politics as it is dominated by the PPP. As the Hindu American Foundation⁶⁸ and the HRCP⁶⁹ argue this law was well designed and tackled many of the issues related to forced marriages as it attempted to mandate specific instruments of implementation as well as laying legal guidelines.

Chapter IV(5) adequately defined a forced conversion as forcing a person to adopt another religion under duress, force, coercion or threat, which can be directed at them or a member of their family, loved one, community or property.

Chapter II mandated the government of Sindh to give police and members of the judiciary periodic sensitisation and awareness training on

the issues related to child marriages. It also mandated the creation of a commission, committee or institution to oversee and ensure the implementation of the act and to provide this body with enough resources to enable them to do so.

Chapter III(4) prohibited the conversion of anyone under 18, unless the parents or guardian also changed religion.

Chapter IV(6) set a minimum of 5 years to a maximum of life imprisonment and a substantial fine to anyone convicted, and that anyone abetting the crime would suffer a minimum of 3 years in jail.

Chapter V(7) made an attempt to cut through the back log of cases in Pakistan's courts and to ensure the necessary swift action in these cases by mandating that courts set a date to hear the case within a week after receiving the petition from the victim or their family members and loved ones.

Chapter X mandated that the victim either be immediately produced in court, placed in the custody of their parents in the case of an alleged or proven minor, or placed in a shelter. However, as demonstrated above, whilst shelters for women do exist they often fail to protect the women from further coercion and threats, Chapter X stipulated that no meetings can take place without the written consent of the victim. Furthermore, even if the woman was protected inside the shelter this does not end the utility of threats as the husband; his family and friends often threaten to harm the families of the women that they kidnap.⁷⁰ Protection must be provided to the families as well as the women involved in these cases. Chapter X mandated that the accused be placed in custody, whilst Chapter XII mandated the courts to provide adequate security to the victim, to prosecution witnesses investigating officers, prosecutors, victim's family, and the judges during the pendency of investigation and trial and, if necessary, post-trial.

Chapter XI mandated that a victim of alleged forced conversion be given 21 days for an independent decision regarding conversion and that during this time they should be placed under temporary custody under the provisions of Chapter X.

Why it failed

Despite the fact that the Bill was passed unanimously by the Provincial Assembly the Bill failed to make it into law as the then Governor Mr. Saeed-uz-Zaman Siddiqui returned it in January 2017. Mr. Siddiqui died shortly afterwards.

The Bill was effectively blocked by the mobilisation of Islamist groups and parties. A group of Ulema, including the Council of Islamic Ideology (CII) met with Dr. Abdul Qayyum Soomro, the chief minister's special assistant on religious affairs, on 5th December 2016, and termed the bill against the basic principles of Islam.⁷¹ Religious parties in Karachi launched a campaign against the bill in order to pressurise the Sindh government into repealing it. Jamaat-I-Islami (JI) argued that there could be no age limit on people converting to Islam. Maulana Tahir Ashrafi, of the Council of Islamic Ideology (CII), opposed the idea of age limits on conversions⁷², and as part of the CII pressurised the PPP co-chairman Asif Ali Zardari into reviewing the law. Another objection was raised against the mandated 21-day wait to allow the person who has allegedly been a victim of forced conversion to study before being allowed to convert.⁷³ Religious parties threatened to lay siege to the Sindh Assembly if the legislature did not repeal the bill. JI leader Advocate Asadullah Bhutto claimed that there had not been a single case of a forced conversion in Sindh.⁷⁴ When the chief of JI, Sirajul Haq, called PPP co-chairperson Asif Ali Zardari the PPP-led government quickly announced that it would make amendments to the law.⁷⁵ The MQM parliamentary leader, Sardar Ahmed, who had supported the law at the time of its passing also wrote to the governor saying that the law had been passed in haste and asked the governor to send it back for modifying. In his observations, Mr. Siddiqui referred to the letters written by the CII and various religious parties that either called for the bill's withdrawal or proposed amendments to it.⁷⁶ This episode displayed the power that the religious establishment and Islamist parties can wield in political affairs. The original proposer of the bill, Nand Kumar, a member of the PML-F, has attacked the PPP saying that they have surrendered the role of holding the mantle for the rights of minorities through the cowardly act of withdrawing the law.⁷⁷ PTI leader Dr. Jaipal Chhabria has also slammed the PPP-led Sindh government, saying that they had failed to protect minorities and that the provincial administration should be pressurised into providing security to non-Muslim communities.⁷⁸ Political analyst Zahid Hussain, and human rights activists Kumar Arora and Romana Bashir all argue that the retreat over this Bill was a bad sign for progress for minorities within Pakistan and that the retreat for the sake of political expediency would have wider societal harm.⁷⁹

Since then, the Pakistan Hindu Council, led by their patron-in-chief and MNA Dr. Ramesh Kumar Vankwani, has attempted to get the Supreme Court to take *suo moto* action (on its own authority action) against kidnappings, forced conversions and forced marriages.⁸⁰

Lal Chand, a Hindu minority representative in the NA also attempted to get a similar bill, The Protection of Minorities Act 2016⁸¹ passed through the NA in September 2016. However, due to his status as a minority representative he lacked political leverage for any serious movement.

Due to his attempt to get the Act passed he has been labelled an Indian spy by Pir Ayub Han Sarhandi, a Sindhi cleric, a good example of how Hindus who attempt to better the position of their co-religionists in Pakistan are labelled traitors.⁸²

A PML-N MPA, Hina Pervaiz Butt, also submitted a law based on the Sindh Bill against forced conversions in the Punjab Assembly April 2017.⁸³ Again, due to the lack of significant political force that minority representatives possess the Bill is unlikely to proceed far.

The Sindh government has recently announced that it will review the bill again, but it is unclear how far any movement can be expected to progress with the new governor Mr. Mohammad Zubair Umar as the religious parties have shown no sign of withdrawing their opposition to the bill.⁸⁴

Recommendations

1. Sindh Criminal Law (Protection of Minorities) Bill to become law

As outlined above the Sindh Criminal Law (Protection of Minorities) Bill was well suited to address many of the issues related to forced conversions and forced marriages. Attempts should be made to try to get the law instituted in Sindh, the National Assembly, Punjab and across Pakistan in order to help religious minorities.

This should ideally be achieved before the dissolution of the provincial assemblies in May 2018.

However, even if the law were to be passed further reforms and initiatives would be necessary to effectively enforce the law and to engender broader societal change to tackle the root cause of forced conversions.

2. Reforming the policing system and the criminal justice system

In many cases the police are unwilling and, in some cases, unable to fulfil their duties of protection. Personal religious convictions or ties to local powerful Muslims involved in the cases mean that the police do not investigate, or do so slowly, so that it is often too late to rescue the girls who have been kidnapped. It is vital that faster response times are ensured in cases where abduction is reported; fair reporting standards and First Information Report registration, as provided by Article 161 of the Pakistan Penal Code, is enforced and that the police provide protection to women victims and their families who are under threat from the abductors.

Pakistan's police have received damning condemnations:

*'Pakistan's police system suffers severe deficiencies in a number of areas, including equipment, technology, personnel, training, and intelligence capability. Moreover, the political will needed to address these issues is largely missing. Besides a poor public image, both the police leadership and the rank and file appear to lack a sense of accountability to the public they are meant to serve. Moreover, the system simply is not structured to reward good behaviour, as merit-based opportunities for professional advancement are scarce, low pay is the norm, and a lack of support and resources compels even many well-intentioned officers to misuse their authority in order to survive.'*¹⁸⁵

Some police reform in Pakistan has demonstrated success; the National Highways and Motorway Police are widely respected in Pakistan. They are better paid, trained and their morale is higher. They are also insulated from politics and so they have been known to stop and fine Ministers for disobeying motorway rules. This reform was achieved through curbing internal corruption and working closely with the wider public. The reform programme was vitally assisted by international specialists to create a sophisticated training programme.

Various organisations and reports have suggested ways in which Pakistan's police system could be improved. These include Pakistan's Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency (PILAT), Human Rights Watch and the Asia Society Independent Commission on Pakistan Police Reform. These organisations recommend:

- A significant increase in Federal and provincial Police budget; presently Punjab spends US\$7.6 per capita per annum whereas per capita spending per annum in India Punjab is US\$15.9, Turkey US\$135 and the London Metropolitan police US\$754. The situation is similar in the rest of Pakistan. Weak financial support drastically decreases the efficiency and morale of the police. Over 3 years the per capita per annum spending needs to be brought at par with the Indian Punjab. Money also needs to be allocated in the Annual Development Plan to build/complete police station building across Pakistan.
- Increase police numbers by 10% annually to bring the police-population ratio eventually at-par with international standards.
- There needs to be implementation of Police Order 2002⁸ across Pakistan in order to ensure that the country is governed by a clear and uniform set of rules and to break the close links between the political establishment and the police.
- There needs to be greater connectivity and coherence between the police and the rest of the Criminal Justice System (CJS); the judiciary, lawyers, prosecutors, and prison service.⁸⁶
- There needs to be constructive engagement between the police, the media and civil society.
- There needs to be improvements in training through improving existing training structures and building specialized training schools and an incremental increase in existing training budget over 4 years from 2% to 10% of total police budget. A key part of this training would have to be how to engage with vulnerable and minority groups.⁸⁷
- Improve infrastructure and equipment support. There also needs to be improvement in performance management, and to further

⁸ Effort to set up institutions and mechanisms that would allow the police to function freely and honestly

improve financial management through capacity building and audits.

- Mandatory women's desks need to be established in every *thana*⁹ to establish an environment in which it is easier for women to report crimes and receive the support that they need.
- There needs to be independent, effective oversight, accountability and complaint procedures. At the moment police implicated in serious abuses are almost never brought to justice as the established legal systems are designed to protect the police from accountability.⁸⁸ This could involve reversing the 2004 Amendment to Police Order 2002, which abolished separate Police Complaints Authority at the local and provincial level.⁸⁹
- It is also crucial to increase the representation of both women and ethnic minorities within the police force in order to ensure greater protection for women and ethnic minorities. At present women represent only 1% of the police force. Women police stations should be established across Pakistan.
- Private sector should be encouraged to contribute to enhancing co-ordination between the public and the police through institutions such as the Citizen-Police Liaison Centre (CPLC) in Karachi.

3. Grass-roots and awareness campaigns

As the Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund argued in 2010, cultural and societal attitudes matter because cultural beliefs and traditions are often more strongly rooted than laws. This means that to tackle fundamental human rights issues there needs to be cultural and societal engagement.⁹⁰

In order to engage effectively it is therefore important to follow two concurrent strategies:

a) Engage Influential Religious Leaders

Religious institutions must be encouraged to stress that conversions should only occur without compulsion. They should also be more diligent in inquiring into the age of the bride or girl/woman being converted and into the nature of the conversion.

Pakistan is a deeply religious country and as outlined above a sufficient number of religious leaders can block legislation. It is also clear that many religious leaders are opposed, in principle, to the idea of forced conversions. Hafiz Tahir Ashrafi has argued that Islam is clear that forced conversions are not permitted.⁹¹ The *Quran* specifically states, "there is no compulsion in religion." Representatives from different faiths and MNAs at

⁹ Police Station

a conference on social cohesion and the integration of non-Muslim citizens in Pakistan titled 'Untied for Promoting Peace and Interfaith Harmony' unanimously declared that forceful conversion is not permitted in Islam.⁹²

It is vital that religious institutions propagate the importance of the lack of compulsion in conversions rather than stressing conversion as a sacred goal. The ideal would be if religious leaders could be encouraged to support the law as it currently stands. However, if the age limit on conversion and 21-day waiting period is too intractable an obstacle then perhaps a compromise could be agreed with the imposition of more stringent tests, the requirement of ID, and analysis of situations where young women and girls are being brought to them for conversion. There are best-case examples of madrassas who take a stricter line of the conversions. For example, in New Islamabad, Mohammed Yaqoob, head of the complex, says that he only accepts family conversions and refuses to convert Hindu girls accompanied by Muslim men wanting to marry them.⁹³ As Pakistan demonstrated during the process of deliberation over the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 there are different interpretations of *Sharia* and there can be interpretations and presentations of *Sharia* that are consonant with Western interpretations of freedom of religion.⁹⁴

Increasing the accuracy and stringency of conversion certificates would be a crucial step to challenging forced conversions.

It would also be important to work with local Hindu religious and secular leaders to encourage the registration of new-born babies. Reliable birth certifications would enable those challenging forced conversions and forced marriages to prove that the girl in question is underage.

b) Use Social Media

Social media is a vital tool to help build grass roots campaigns, to tackle religious hatred and to raise awareness. There are over 44 million social media accounts in Pakistan, with 30 million users on Facebook according to statistics provided by the PTA in November 15, 2016.⁹⁵ Projects already exist that aim to use social media to help to create interfaith harmony and to tackle human rights abuses. For example, FACES (Formation, Awareness and Community Empowerment Society) Pakistan launched Engaging Pakistani Interfaith Communities ⁹⁶ in February 2017 in partnership with the Kingdom of the Netherlands.⁹⁷

4. Substantial and sustained judicial reform

As outlined in this report similar problems exist within the judiciary as the police. Personal religious bias or connections to important Muslims

involved in a case often mean that the man's word is often taken at face value and the kidnapped woman/girl left in the hands of her abductor. Legal training and a system requiring greater accountability should be set up to ensure best practice in all cases. The training of judicial officers should include sensitisation to issues facing women and religious minorities.

The Federal and State governments should ensure that proper legal protection, redress and procedures are available to vulnerable communities, particularly in rural areas. Federal and State governments should also provide sufficient protection to judges and other members of the legal system to ensure that they are not ruled by the threat of mob violence.⁹⁸

5. Institutional support for minority and human rights commissions

It is vital to address the failures of the institutional protections of human rights. More funds should be provided to ministries, the commission for minorities and official bodies charged with looking after minority rights and affairs. These funds should be used to provide these institutions with greater authority, specifically the ability to hold police and government officials accountable for violating and failing to protect the rights of minorities.⁹⁹

As the South Asia Partnership argues district committees should have the mandate to take up the cases of forced conversions and register FIRs.¹⁰⁰

The Pakistani government should also consider establishing Provincial Commissions for minorities who will be empowered to take up forced conversion and forced marriage cases. A decentralised Provincial Commission would enable institutions to get closer to the concerns of the population and provide more effective representation. Furthermore, a body that was devoted to the concern of forced conversions could dedicate greater resources to investigating and taking up cases of forced conversions. If the commission were given powers to sit as a court, minorities would have much greater faith in their judgements and procedures compared to the tarnished existing court structure. Such a commission should operate under laws similar to the Paris Principles¹⁰ where they have an independent budget, staff and working procedure. A similar institution was established in Rajasthan State, India in 2001.¹⁰¹

¹⁰ Rules established for National Human Rights Institutions

Helplines could be established for easy and safe reporting of forced conversions and abductions so that victim's families do not have to subject themselves to potential public condemnation and attack.

Psychological and medical help should be provided to those who have suffered from abduction, rape and forced conversion before, during and after the trial procedure so that they are able to testify before court and recover effectively from their ordeal.

6. Enhance socio-economic and cultural position of minorities

As outlined above the position of religious minorities in Pakistan is overwhelmingly at the bottom of the socio-economic structure. This places them in a powerless position and leaves them vulnerable to predation and forced conversions. This is often compounded by the Untouchable (Dalit) caste status of many Hindus in Sindh.

In order to mitigate this, the government of Pakistan must ensure equal access to education, jobs, government positions and community life for religious minorities and members of lower Castes. As recommended by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) in 2009, the Government of Pakistan should adopt a law prohibiting discrimination based on religion or belief or caste.¹⁰² Scheduled Caste and those in bonded labour should be given their share of agricultural productions and land distributed amongst them. This can be achieved by making progressive changes to Tenancy Legislation (particularly the Sindh Tenancy Act) enabling more equal land distribution and ensuring the enactment of legislation against bonded labour by Provincial governments.¹⁰³ Affirmative action should also be followed for members of religious minorities and lower castes in order to ameliorate their socio-economic position.¹⁰⁴

How UK and Commonwealth Parliamentarians can help

The power of diplomacy and international relations

Recent history and current geopolitical considerations show that Pakistan sometimes responds to international pressure on human rights issues. Pakistan's failure to secure re-election to the UN Human Rights Council in 2015 was widely seen as an international humiliation, as it was the first time that Pakistan had lost a major election at the UN¹⁰⁵ and prompted introspection and internal changes. This led to the Ministry of Human Rights being declared an independent Ministry in 2015, reversing the merging with the Ministry of Law and Justice, and the launch of the first ever 'Action Plan for the Improvement of Human Rights in Pakistan' in 2016.¹⁰⁶ Whilst these could very easily be purely demonstrative exercises they still show the impact that international diplomacy can have upon Pakistani internal policy and that international pressure must be maintained to ensure that these are not simply cosmetic changes.

Pakistan's geopolitical situation has recently shifted dramatically. US-Pakistan relations have been crucial to Pakistan and since the beginning of the 'War on Terror' Pakistan has been a major non-NATO ally of the US. However, the relationship has frequently been strained. The administration of President Trump has taken an extremely tough position on Pakistan.

"We can no longer be silent about Pakistan's safe havens for terrorist organisations." ¹⁰⁷ President Trump's policy statement about Afghanistan on 21 August 2017.

By calling upon India to help in Afghanistan the US has further rattled Pakistan.¹⁰⁸ This was an unprecedented warning from the United States¹⁰⁹. Trump's New Year's day tweet compounded this by slamming Pakistan for 'lies and deceit' saying that US had given Pakistan \$33 billion in the last 15 years and yet still provided a safe haven for militants.¹¹⁰

On 4 January the US suspended around \$2 billion in security aid to Pakistan for failing to clamp down on the Afghan Taliban and the Haqqani Network.¹¹¹ The Pakistani Foreign Minister Khawaja Muhammad Asif stated that they no longer see the US as an ally after the suspension of security aid.¹¹²

The US has also placed Pakistan on the special watch list of countries that severely violate religious freedom under the International Religion Freedom Act 1998.¹¹³ State Department spokesperson Heather Nauert

stated that these designations are aimed at improving the respect for religious freedom in these countries.

The EU has a key role to play. Pakistan's renewal for GSP+ status with the EU has been widely questioned and is currently under review. The GSP+ is a favourable trade preference scheme, which is conditional on respect for international human rights obligations. Retaining GSP+ status is vital for Pakistan. Currently the EU is the main destination for Pakistan's exports, increasing from 25.7% to 37.1% of total exports, with GSP+ status beginning in December 2013. According to the Business Recorder on 22 January 2018 the EU has also reportedly conveyed to Islamabad that renewal of GSP+ will be linked to a positive outcome for Asia Bibi, a Christian woman facing death in a blasphemy case.¹¹⁴

The EU should retain a broader focus on the plight of religious minorities in Pakistan. The scale of the problem of forced conversions must be addressed and the Pakistani government must be reminded of its duties to protect the human rights of its citizens and encouraged to do more if it wants to maintain its GSP+ status.

Clearly the EU has taken the issue of the rights of religious minorities seriously and there are clear signs that legislators across the EU want to see action. On 3 December members of the Italian Senate Mr. Domenico De Siano, Mr. Franco Cardillo, Mr. Enzo Fasano, Mr. Cosimo Sibilio and Mr. Domenico Auricchio argued that the GSP+ of Pakistan should not be renewed until they fulfil the basic human rights of all and stop all atrocities and persecution against Christians in Pakistan.¹¹⁵ In January 2017 there was a Written Question to the EU by Ilhan Kyuchuk MEP asking whether the EU would do anything about the failure to pass the Protection of Minorities Bill.¹¹⁶ In January 2015 Cornelis (Dennis) de Jong MEP posed a written question to the European Parliament about the forced conversion of Hindu girls in Pakistan and what actions they are taking to address the issue.¹¹⁷

The BRICS conference statement on 2 September expressing concern over Pakistan-based militant groups like the LeT and the Haqqani Network compounded the pressure on Pakistan. This was a big diplomatic defeat for Pakistan, who often rely on Beijing's support to avoid global isolation,¹¹⁸ and China has in the past consistently refused to condemn militant groups with suggested links to the Pakistani deep state.¹¹⁹ Pakistan's Foreign Minister Khawaja Asif had been planning to visit China and Russia to garner support in the wake of Trump's criticism of Pakistan relating to his Afghanistan policy and the implied threat of sanctions. This combined condemnation by the world's major powers and evidence of India's growing diplomatic influence led the Pakistan army chief, General Bajwa, to state that the Kashmir issue should be resolved by dialogue.¹²⁰ However, the China-Pakistan relationship

remains strong with the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as the flagship project of the One Belt One Road Initiative. CPEC involves the injection of \$62 billion by the Chinese into improving Pakistan's infrastructure.¹²¹

As well as tackling the militant groups within Pakistan, acting to tackle human rights issues faced by minorities could help to lessen international condemnation and isolation. Enhancing freedom of religion and belief is also recognised by the UN as an effective way to combat violent extremism.¹²²

The Commonwealth could be a potential network for Pakistan to receive support for this effort and provide further international contacts and support. Pakistan actively engages in the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings and other Commonwealth activities and institutions. These shared platforms and links provide vital opportunities for formal and informal diplomatic channels to impress upon Pakistani politicians the importance of protecting minorities for the sake of Pakistan's future development and security.

Working with Pakistani politicians

The Asia Foundation and Pattan recently completed the Pakistan Religious Freedom Initiative (PRFI), which aimed to increase the capacity of stakeholders, particularly local executive and legislative bodies, to engage in debate and legislation over the issue of religious freedom.¹²³ The project was assisted with funds from the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (DFATD).¹²⁴ The project also worked to train and sensitize officials from law enforcement agencies, lawyers and elected leaders so that religious minorities could have better access to justice.¹²⁵ As a result of the project Religious Freedom Caucuses were established in the National and two Provincial Assemblies (Punjab and Sindh) in order to promote inter-faith harmony and highlight issues afflicting minorities.^{126 127}

It is crucial to continue to build the number of parliamentarians who are engaged in FoRB issues and their capacity to bring about effective changes is developed. Commonwealth Institutions, like the CPA, could provide additional parliamentary training and support and Commonwealth Parliamentarians should work to improve the domestic political influence of the individuals involved in FoRB.

There are several MPs working within Pakistan who support action on forced conversion legislation. Raha Zafarul Haq, (PML-N) Leader of the House in the Senate, stated in November 2016 that there were no

problems in the Sindh Criminal Law (Protection of Minorities) Bill passed by the Sindh Assembly and that the bill was greatly needed¹²⁸, and that it was against the teachings of Islam to compel anyone to convert.¹²⁹ PTI Chief Imran Khan spoke out against forcibly converting non-Muslims by force on the 22nd October 2017.¹³⁰ Babar Nawaz Khan, chairman of the Standing Committee on Human Rights, supported Mr. Lal Chand in his attempts to get the National Assembly to adopt the Protection of Minorities Act 2016. Similarly, Hina Pervaiz Butt has recently placed a similar law before the Punjab Assembly. Azra Fazal Pechucho, sister of former President Asif Ali Zardari, raised the issue in the National Assembly in March 2012 calling for legislation to tackle the abduction and forced conversions of Hindus. Other key members to engage with would be Afrasiab Khattak, ex-Chairperson of the HRCP and present Chairman of the Senate Functional Committee on Human Rights, who places enormous emphasis upon the importance of curbing religious extremism.

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Another important Pakistani politician to engage with would be Sherry Rehman, a PPP member of the Pakistani Senate from Sindh. She is well known for her human rights work and has shown commitment to liberal values and women's empowerment. She founded and heads the think tank Jinnah Institute, which promotes progressivism. In March 2009 she resigned her post as Information Minister in protest over the government's attempt to place restrictions on press freedom.¹³² In 2010 she tabled a bill seeking to abolish the death penalty for blasphemy.¹³³ She was the first Pakistani to be recognised with an award for independent journalism by the Muslim World Awards hosted by the House of Lords in 2002.¹³⁴ She was also awarded the International Peace Award 2008 for Democrats by the International Human Rights Commission.¹³⁵

Potential questions to British Government

As outlined in this report the UK has strong economic, demographic and developmental aid ties with Pakistan and as such the UK can play a key role in helping to tackle the scourge of forced marriages and forced conversions in Pakistan.

This section will outline questions for UK Parliamentarians to ask the relevant government departments.

Department for International Development (DfID)

- Only 1 project out of 28 currently active projects in Pakistan is devoted towards strengthening the rule of law in Pakistan. Will the British government consider spending more of its development budget in Pakistan on projects that increase the rule of law in line

- with the Sustainable Development Goals; ensuring equal access to justice, and promoting and enforcing non-discriminatory laws?
- What projects are DfID running in Pakistan that aims to improve the effectiveness and independence of human rights institutions like the National Commission for Human Rights?
 - What projects are DfID running in Pakistan that engage with religious leaders and help to embed human rights norms, the rule of the law and the rights outlined in the ICCPR?
 - Has DfID examined ways in which it could work with Commonwealth institutions and organisations like the Commonwealth Judicial Association in order to secure the rule of law in Pakistan?
 - Will staff from DfID or the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Magna Carta Fund for Human Rights and Democracy study the Engaging Pakistani Interfaith Communities online project and the Pakistan Religious Freedom Initiative in order to learn from their experiences with a view to supporting similar projects?
 - Given DfID's Partnership Principles include the commitment of a partner to respecting human rights and other international obligations how does DfID reconcile the aid given to Pakistan with the prevalence of forced conversions and forced marriages, and the failure to pass effective legislation to prevent them?

Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO)

- Given that 1000 Hindu and Christian girls and young women are abducted and forcibly converted in Pakistan every year will the Foreign Secretary commit to pressing the EU to ensure the GSP+'s renewal is conditional upon passing legislation ensuring the protection of vulnerable minorities from forced conversion?
- What representations has HMG made to the government of Pakistan about forced conversions and the possibility of a federal law along similar lines to the Sindh Criminal Law (Protection of Minorities) Bill?
- Has HMG spoken directly to the PPP and to the governor of Sindh, Muhammad Zubair, about securing the passage of the Sindh Criminal Law (Protection of Minorities) Bill?
- How does HMG plan to support the Commonwealth Office for Civil and Criminal Justice Reform? Will HMG consider working with this organisation to encourage legal and police reform in Pakistan?
- What representations has HMG made to the United States about the importance of securing the right to freedom of religion or belief to stabilise Pakistan against the threat of extremism?
- Will HMG consider establishing a unit for forced conversions in the Pakistani embassy?

- In line with the recommendations made by the APPG report on Freedom of Religion or Belief (Article 18: From Rhetoric to Reality), is the FCO considering introducing within the FORB toolkit specific guidance to UK Foreign office and Embassy staff in Pakistan, matters related to forced marriages and forced conversions?

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