

**"7th Session of the United Nations Forum on Minority Issues (25 - 26 November 2014), Geneva, Switzerland."**

From the desk of SINDHRights.  
(Sindh International Network for Democracy and Human Rights).

From Crisis to catastrophe: Case of minorities in Sindh and Pakistan.

Honourable Chairman, your excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

SINDHRights expresses its sincere appreciation to Forum Secretariat for organising this event in support of the minorities living around the globe.

I avail myself here an opportunity to briefly introduce the SINDHRights. SINDHRights is a international network for democracy and human rights in Sindh. It is committed to achieving human rights for the Sindhis of Sindh in south-eastern Pakistan through nonviolent advocacy, activism and academic campaigns. SINDHRights brings together Sindhis of all religious and geographical backgrounds and their supporters in a proactive, progressive movement, with the aim to inform others of the human rights atrocities occurring in Sindh.

Dear Sir ,

On behalf of SINDHRights, I would like to register the concerns regarding the plight of minorities living in Sindh.

Minorities in province of Sindh continue to find themselves vulnerable to all forms of atrocities and violence like abductions, forced conversions followed by forced marriages, attack on worship places. They live in continuous fear of harassment .Given the fact that more than half of the minorities' population in Pakistan is settled in the province of Sindh, the plight of minorities merits attention . To illustrate the atrocities and hate-related practices being faced by minorities, I will cite here the latest case of Anjali meghwar, a 12yrs old Hindu minority girl. The case of Anjali, a daughter of School teacher, is emblematic of the problems being faced by Minorities . She was forcefully abducted, converted and later married off to a local Muslim person. Shockingly a right activist Mr. Amar Fayyaz who was actively protesting for recovery of abducted minority girl has gone missing.

Dear sir,

Perpetrators of such crimes often find protection, support and patronage from individuals belonging to shrines and religious seminaries. Defying the law, Patron figures publicly sanctify the forced conversions and marriages of minority girls without any fear of being prosecuted by state.

Absence of appropriate legislation like separate marriage acts for Minorities, Vague and religiocised legal codes, provide the source and justification for such crimes. And in cases where the Constitution has provisions for safeguarding the minorities, implementation is always the missing link. Law enforcement bodies display unwillingness to prosecute the perpetrators. Atrocities are not only fate of religious Minorities, but are also being inflicted upon political activists belonging to nationalist parties in Sindh, who are often subjected to extra-judicial treatment like enforced disappearances and deaths e.t.c. Sadly a university student namely Asif Panhwar is the latest victim.

Dear sir,

I would also like to draw attention of this Forum to the alarming issue of the misuse of controversial Blasphemy Law.

Countless people, from ordinary citizens to university academicians, belonging to every faith, have fallen victim to this law.

During this year a famous rights activists and lawyer Mr. Rashid Rehman, who was also regional coordinator for Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, Was shot dead in his chamber for taking up the case of a blasphemy accused university lecturer, currently imprisoned, namely Mr. Junaid Hafeez. Mr. Rehman, was first threatened publicly inside the court premises for taking up the case in the court of the law and later on killed.

Other prominent Political figures including Salman Taseer, a sitting governor by then, and Mr. Shahbaz Bhatti, ministers of Minorities by then, have already sacrificed their life for demanding the public debate of Blasphemy law.

During the military regime of General Zia, under the programme to reinforce and promote ultra-religious doctrines, the British-times blasphemy law was revived and amended and section-295 was inserted into the penal code of Pakistan. Section 295 provided for the death penalty for blasphemy. Fears of misuse of law, which now carried death penalty, became real soon after. Pakistani society witnessed a sudden surge in blasphemy accusations. Rights organisations were able to establish on the basis of concrete evidences that in many case the law was invoked to grab property or to settle a personal score or to cause defeat to rivals.

Dear sir,

It must be stressed upon Pakistani government and all the state institutions to play their role in reforming and democratising the constitution and by eliminating the laws which are discriminatory and reinforce the religious extremism and validate the violence against common citizens including members of Minorities.

There is never before need to support and empower the truly secular and progressive forces within Pakistan. There is every reason to believe that failure to do so will soon change current crisis into a big catastrophe.

Thank you for your attention.