

Human Rights Council Forum on Minority Issues
Eleventh Session - 29 and 30 November 2018

Agenda Item 4. Ensuring the right to a nationality for persons belonging to minorities through facilitation of birth registration, naturalization and citizenship for stateless minorities.

Oral Statement: Strengthening Participatory Organization

Delivered by Mr. Pirbhu Lal Satyani, Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network and Member of National Lobbying Delegation on Minorities in Pakistan.

Ms. Chairperson,

My name is Pirbhu Satyani. I belong to the Hindu Religious Minority in Pakistan.

Religious and caste discrimination is a serious issue today in Pakistan. The Hindu religious minorities, particularly the Dalits, are overwhelmingly rural, as 90% live in villages. Though not strictly denied citizenship by the government, many Dalits in Pakistan sustain a de facto statelessness, through poverty and segregation. Most of development schemes go to upper castes communities. Even in the cities/towns, some of the Dalits communities such as Bagris, Gurgillas and Kabootra's caste people are living as nomadic life in the poorest parts, in squalid slums.

The Dalits, both in rural and urban areas face poor welfare attention from the Government. Particularly those who have nomadic lifestyles do not possess national identity cards or birth registration of their kids, so are deprived of various developmental schemes of the Government such as Benazir Income Support Program (BISP), Bait Ul Mal Fund, Minority development fund, scholarships, and government land entitlement project for women. Lacking a strong political leadership of their own, they are not able to effectively assert their voice in demanding their rights from the state or from the larger society.

Ms. Chairperson, a way forward to rehabilitate the nomadic Dalit minority community in Pakistan and to provide them with due citizenship rights, is to put efforts to register members of these communities, by issuing them national identity cards, birth certificates of their children and also by declaring the relevant populations in the upcoming census results. Besides, for the empowerment and rehabilitation of these communities, a special and targeted budget would ensure equal rights for Dalits in the country.

Mr/Ms. Chairperson, I thank you for your attention.