



Jubilee Campaign contribution to UN Secretary-General on lack of progress towards ending child, early and forced marriage in Pakistan

Background

Many cases are reported in Pakistan in which predominantly juvenile girls from religious minority communities are kidnapped, forcibly converted to Islam, and married off to Muslim men, usually the very same perpetrators of their abductions. While “forced 13 conversion” is not an offense in Pakistan, abduction and forced marriage are both criminal offenses. According to law, it is a criminal offense to solemnize the marriage of children, for adults to marry children, for parents or guardians to facilitate such marriages, and for officials to formalize child marriages; however, the law fails to expressly state that child marriages are considered null and void. The perpetrators mostly manipulate the law and justice system to get away with their crimes due to the absence of legislation which deals with forced faith conversions, and the lack of enforcement of existing domestic law especially towards the minorities; this remains a key impediment in preventing such harmful and inhumane practices. Forced conversions and child marriages of minority girls are validated by the courts as well as facilitated by religious clerics and police.

Unique Cases

In April 2022, 13-year-old Christian schoolgirl Zarvia Parvaiz was abducted in Rawalpindi by a man named Imran Shahzad, who subsequently and forcibly married the child. Despite filing a First Information Report, a habeas corpus petition, and a constitutional petition, the court dismissed these, citing Zarvia’s statement in court - made under duress from her captor and threats to her family - that the marriage was consensual. Remanded back to the custody of her ‘husband’ and his wife Adiba, Zarvia has been subjected to forced drugging and imbibing; rape and sexual violence; starvation; coerced labor; burning with cigarettes; electrocution.

In October 2022, 15-year-old Christian girl Mishal Rasheed was abducted, sexually assaulted, and forcibly converted to Islam by Abdul Sattar. Assailants entered her home, beating her father unconscious and kidnapping her. Mishal was gang raped and spent half a year in captivity.

In December 2022, Muslim shop owner Muhammad Usman abducted 13-year-old Christian girl Hoorab Masih when she visited the store. Usman raped her, converted her to Islam, and forcibly married her. In February, the perpetrator was apprehended and Hoorab was rescued.

In May 2023, a nine-year-old Hindu girl was kidnapped from her home by a 55-year-old already married man, decades her senior. The perpetrator additionally forced her to convert to Islam.¹

In June 2023 Three armed men - Akhtar Gabol, Faizan Jat, and Sarang Khaskheli - kidnapped and held 14-year-old Hindu girl Suhana Kumar at gunpoint by forcibly marrying her and converting her to Islam.

¹ OpIndia, [“Pakistan: 9-year-old Hindu girl kidnapped, converted to Islam and married to a 55-year-old Muslim man in Sindh province”](#), 31 May 2023.

In February 2024, young Christian woman Rashida Bibi escaped from the captivity of Muslim man Muhammad Riaz who had abducted her an entire 13 years prior. Forcibly married and converted to Islam, Rashida bore five children of rape. Following an altercation in December 2013 in which Riaz inflicted tremendous physical and sexually upon her she was able to escape and return to her parents. Riaz pursued Rashida after her escape but police intervened and arrested him, reprehensibly releasing him from custody the following day without charges.²

Recommendations

In its December 2022 State party report to the Human Rights Committee , Pakistan asserts 14 that “its criminal justice system is vigilant in respect of forced conversions and marriages and if any individual case is reported by media or through aggrieved parties, institutional mechanisms and courts take the matter very seriously and conduct proper administrative and judicial enquiries to ensure justice.” However, in reality cases of abductions, coerced faith conversions, and child marriages of Hindu and Christian girls in Pakistan are negligibly investigated and prosecuted. Whilst all citizens in Pakistan face obstacles in access to justice, minority religious groups face even greater difficulties. The police often turn a blind eye to reports of abduction and forced conversions, allowing greater impunity for perpetrators. The police forces, which are overwhelmingly Muslim, generally sympathize with the goal of converting religious minorities to Islam. In limited instances of police intervention, local leaders exert considerable pressure to prevent any action.

Following the recovery of a girl from an abduction, forced conversion to Islam, and/or child marriage, the girl should be taken to a safe house to ensure she is able to provide a true, uncoerced testimony of events without fear of retaliation from her abductor.

- A specially trained and appointed taskforce should conduct proper and objective investigations regarding the circumstances surrounding the girl's conversion and marriage;
- Allow for the presence of a minority representative or ombudsman to review the case;
- Train judges to interpret laws in accordance with international human rights norms and legislation;
- It should be ensured that secular laws which set the minimum legal age for marriage to 16 or 18 years preside over Islamic laws that allow for marriage as soon as puberty is reached;
- Create an appeal or reporting mechanism to flag judges, police officers, religious institutes, Muslim clerics, and official actors who discriminate against, violate rights of, or fail to protect religious minorities in cases of abduction, forced conversion, and child marriage;
- Enact provisions to invalidate, annul or dissolve marriages contracted under duress, with due consideration for the women and girls concerned, and to ensure access to justice, remedy, protection and adequate assistance for victims.

² Shafique Khokhar, [“Rashida’s ordeal: ten years in chains in a forced marriage”](#), *Asia News*, 12 March 2024,