



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Joint statement by the International Dalit Solidarity Network, Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network, International Movement Against All Forms of Racism and Discrimination (IMADR), Minority Rights Group International, Anti-Slavery International and FORUM-ASIA.

13 November 2017

## **Pakistan must act immediately to protect Dalits against forced disappearances, slavery and discrimination**

***As the UN review Pakistan's human rights record on 13 November, we urge the Government to commit with time bound action plans to end ongoing serious human rights violations against Dalits in Pakistan. Despite general commitments made to this effect at previous UN UPR reviews of Pakistan these have not been implemented and violations such as bonded labour, forced conversions and disappearances, murder and persecution of Dalit rights defenders continue unabated. As a newly elected member of the UN Human Rights Council, Pakistan must ensure that commitments to protect the rights of Dalits are urgently and duly implemented.***

### **Forced conversions and disappearances on the rise**

We are especially concerned at reports from human rights defenders in Pakistan stating that many of these violations have escalated since the last review in 2012, drawing particular attention to the issue of forced conversions and kidnapping of young Dalit girls and women, as well as human rights defenders facing forced disappearances, persecution and even murder for attempting to protect and promote the human rights of Dalits.

Dalits, also known as 'scheduled castes', in Pakistan fall victim to multiple discrimination - due to their religious status as non-Muslims in a Muslim state and due to their caste and many face debt bondage and suffer numerous forms of abuse. Dalit women in Pakistan fall victim to sexual abuse, abduction and forced religious conversions. "Untouchability" is practiced in all spheres of private and public life and crimes against Dalits are often committed with impunity. Despite this there seems to be no serious action taken by the Government to protect and uphold the rights of over 2 Million Dalits estimated to be living in Pakistan.

### **Pakistan neglecting its human rights commitments**

Pakistan has completed two cycles of the UPR, receiving and accepting several recommendations regarding the protection and empowerment of religious minorities and scheduled castes, but unfortunately, the progress is slow to invisible.

In 2016, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) expressed its deep concerns about the continuing discrimination against Dalits, particularly in employment and education, as well as 'abduction of Dalit women and girls for the purpose of forced conversion to Islam and forced marriage'.

In June 2017, the Committee of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) recommended the Government to 'carry out a study on the situation of the "scheduled castes" or Dalits, with the participation of the members of that community and of relevant experts' and 'take effective measures to eradicate stigma and prejudice against members of the "scheduled castes", including awareness-raising campaigns, and to combat discrimination against them, particularly in the employment and education sectors'.

However, despite ample documentation, during the first review of Pakistan under the CESCR, in June 2017, the Government of Pakistan claimed there is no caste-based discrimination in the country and it was unaware of where Dalit population lived. This indicates that the issues faced by Dalit and minority communities in Pakistan are not a priority for the Government.

### **States must urge Pakistan to implement and follow up on new UPR recommendations**

The Universal Periodic Review offers an opportunity for states to recommend to the Government of Pakistan to implement concrete, time-bound action to eliminate these issues making explicit reference to Dalits and the rights violations they are suffering. We call upon the Government to accept the recommendations and to honour their commitments and make sure that the recommendations at the November 2017 UPR are not only accepted but also urgently implemented and systematically followed up.

IDSN and the Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network have made a [submission to the 2017 Pakistan UPR review](#) detailing key action that must be taken to protect and promote the rights of Dalits in Pakistan. A [factsheet including key recommendations](#) has also been published.