



Press Statement

Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network Calls for Affirmative Action to Mainstream the Scheduled Caste Community and Address the Constitutional Violation of their Rights

KARACHI, Aug. 16: The Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network (PDSN) has expressed serious concern over growing insecurity among the Hindu community of the country, particularly the low caste minority groups commonly known as the scheduled castes, that are not only subjected to rights exclusion and discrimination at the state level, violating all constitutional provisions, but face social and religious segregation and violence.

The recent wave of kidnappings and forced conversion of the scheduled caste girls have sent a wave of panic among the scheduled caste community that find little social support either from the government or the general public due to their extreme marginalized status.

The PDSN, a network of over thirty civil society organizations and associations of scheduled castes, in a policy statement issued here on **Thursday** said that while the reported migration of a large section of the Hindu Community last week drew the attention of the public to the plight of non-Muslims in the country, the fact is that the lives of the low caste Hindus and Christians are under permanent threat.

“The status of minorities in general is depressing, scheduled castes are the most marginalized groups faced with multiple problems,” says Malji Rathore and Zulfiqar Shah, Coordinator and Secretary of the Network in a joint statement. “With poor socio economic indicators, they have no representation in the political power structures making giving them no voice to express their concerns.”

The scheduled castes Hindus are the worst victims of violence and discrimination on part of state as well as non-state actors. These groups even do not have the means to leave the country. “It’s good that the government is finally moved and ministers are visiting affected families after the media highlighted stories of mass migration of Hindus but what about the problems of those who even cannot get a passport made leave alone travel to other countries,” asked the statement.

PDSN says that the sexual exploitation of girls and women of the scheduled castes Hindus such as Bheel, Bagri, Nalmaki, Menghwar and Kolhi particularly in lower districts of Sindh and southern Punjab is a frequent occurrence. Sexual harassment of the scheduled castes girls including rape and gang rape is not considered unusual and news or attention worthy by the media or state authorities for any action. Over a dozen cases have been reported during the last few months without any action.

Violence against religious minorities particularly the lower caste is often so vicious that it resulted in loss of lives. The killing of a Christian worker by a landlord in Mirpurkhas last month is just a case in point. Unfortunately, the murderers got away by taking refuge in the Jirga systems, a parallel judicial system under the tribal customs, while the state and judiciary remained silent spectators.

The statement pointed out that the places of worships are also not secure in the country. In Thatta, a group of influential Muslims did not allow scheduled caste Hindus to secure their graveyard by erecting a wall. Several incidents of attempts to occupy the worship places of Hindus have also been reported from Mirpurkhas and Sanghar districts during the last few months.



Pakistan is signatory to the International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) and even its own Constitution forbids any discrimination. But unfortunately not only discrimination against minorities has become a common practice in everyday social life, it surfaced as an institutional exercise during the floods of 2010 and 2011 when the scheduled caste section faced expulsion from the government relief camps and denial of the relief goods at the time of severe humanitarian emergency. In this case, delay in making the outcome of a presidential inquiry report public indicates a lack of seriousness on the part of present government to address the issue.

The economic exploitation of the scheduled castes Hindus particularly those working as bonded labourers is another area of concern. Unwillingness of the state in bringing any fundamental change in the feudal dominated agrarian economy has resulted in a situation where hundreds of thousands of families are living a life similar to slavery.

Over all the marginalization of the scheduled castes is reflected from social economic indicators, which depicts very dismal picture of the conditions of the marginalised population which has only 26% of literacy comparing to 58% general literacy rate in the country, according to a survey report.

The PDSN says that the seats of parliament were increased from 200 to 342 in 2002; however, no addition was made in the seats reserved for minorities, which remained 10 today. In the total 446 seats of senate and national assembly, there is only a single member from scheduled castes. There is no minister or advisor from scheduled castes among the 54 member federal cabinet ministers.

In Sindh, where a majority of the scheduled castes is residing, they have no representation in the provincial cabinet of 52 members or in the legislative assembly leaving them un-represented in the legislative and policy-making power order.

The statement says that the lack of representation in power structures has resulted in a situation where funds allocated for uplift of minorities are lapsed regularly or mostly spent on upper caste Hindus.

The PDSN while recognizing some steps taken by the present democratic government for the uplift of scheduled castes believes that the solution lies in concrete steps and serious interventions on the part of state institutions in general and presents government in particular.

- This should start with formation of a Commission on Faith Conversions comprising persons from all faiths and religious groups. Any case of faith conversion should be overseen by the Commission, which can draw clear guidelines.
- Equally important is the establishment of a high-ranking committee to prepare reports on the socio-economic conditions of lower caste minority groups on the pattern of "Sachar Committee Report" in India.
- The Government should immediately announce concrete measures with monitoring mechanism for the security and safety of all non Muslims, particularly Hindus.
- The government should announce a Constitutional reforms package including provision of necessary protection and a set of affirmative actions especially for the scheduled caste Hindus.

Ends