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Legislation stressed for scheduled caste Hindus

By [Zahid Gishkori](#)

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Scheduled castes Hindu women are still unable to get education because of socio-cultural barriers in Pakistan. PHOTO: (ONLINE)

ISLAMABAD: There is an urgent need for a comprehensive legislation pertaining to scheduled caste Hindus living in Pakistan.

This was the conclusion of a policy forum held by the Scheduled Caste Rights Movement (SCRM) on Tuesday. Prominent political figures and minority representatives also attended the forum. Yasmin Rehman, adviser to the prime minister of women affairs, stressed the need for a comprehensive legislation so that scheduled caste Hindus can have access to basic human rights, including marriage registration, land ownership, no discrimination, protection of their religious places and equal political participation.

More than three million Hindus live in Pakistan, of which about 2.5 million belong to scheduled castes. Many of them are uneducated. "Right now, a vast majority of Hindus belonging to the scheduled castes do not have National Identity Cards, which hinders their movement outside of their localities," Rehman said.

Married Hindu couples also face considerable difficulties when they travel because they have no documented proof of their marriage.

In some instances Hindu women have been forced to convert to Islam. “Why (have these women) been forcibly converted to Islam and married to Muslim men when they had already been married to Hindus for years?” “Rehman asked. Ramesh Lal, Parliamentary secretary on minority affairs, said that discrimination and hatred against scheduled caste Hindus is a violation of fundamental human rights. “All forms of discrimination and segregation should be abolished under legislation in the constitution.

Stern laws with punishment should also be framed against segregation of any kind,” Lal demanded. Nafisa Shah, member of the National Assembly’s standing committee for minorities said, “Due to the absence of Hindu marriage registration, women fail to get any share in their parents’ or husbands’ property,” she said. Permaisry Mai, a leading member of SCRM, urged the parliamentarians to ensure speedy legislation on the rights of scheduled castes.

She hoped that the parliament would pass the draft of the marriage registration bill of 2009 and make it into a law. The Pakistani Hindu Marriages Registration Bill 2009 has been prepared in consultation with Hindu religious scholars and the Hindu community. Riaz Fatiyana, chairman of the National Assembly’s standing committee on human rights, asked the Hindu leader to submit a written application regarding their demands so that he could formally take it up during meetings of the standing committee.

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