

Coalition for Genocide Response Submission to the Report to the United Nations General Assembly on Eliminating Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief and the Achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 16

The Coalition for Genocide Response (CGR) is a human rights coalition-building organisation that works towards a comprehensive response to genocide and other international crimes, engaging the UK, regional and international actors.

The CGR welcomes this opportunity to contribute to the Report to the United Nations General Assembly on Eliminating Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief and the Achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG 16). The following submission focuses on a few examples of discrimination in law and practice in countries where genocide and other mass atrocities have been or are being perpetrated, most notably, Iraq, Myanmar, China, Nigeria and North Korea. Furthermore, the report comments on a concerning phenomenon of gross human rights abuses in Pakistan that target religious minority women and girls.

1. Iraq

1.1. Justice for the Victims of the Daesh Atrocities

In 2014, the terror organisation Daesh unleashed genocidal atrocities against religious minorities: Yazidis, Christians and others. They brought about this genocide by way of murder, enslavement, deportation and forcible transfer of populations, imprisonment, torture, abduction of women and children, exploitation, abuse, rape, sexual violence, forced marriage - unabated. Daesh specifically targeted religious minorities, including Muslim minorities, for destruction in an attempt to annihilate religious pluralism and establish a purely Islamic region. Daesh specifically targeted religious minority women and girls, trafficked them to other parts of the world and subjected them to a litany of atrocities.

Some of the perpetrators are being prosecuted, whether in the countries where the crimes were committed or abroad. However, in Iraq, there are certain shortfalls with the Iraqi Penal Code that prevent prosecutions for the above-mentioned crimes. For example, the Iraqi Penal Code does not criminalise genocide and other international crimes.¹ Furthermore, it does not address several crimes

¹ See: Iraq: Penal Code [Iraq], No. 111 of 1969, July 1969. Available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/452524304.html>.

perpetrated against women and girls, limiting the number of acts for which Daesh fighters can face criminal prosecution. For example, marital rape is not criminalised in Iraq; moreover, the law does not criminalise domestic violence, and as it is clear from Paragraph 41(1) of the Iraqi Penal Code, the ‘punishment’ of a wife can be justified. The issue became glaring with the rise of Daesh and its use of rape, sexual violence and forced marriage against women and girls. Paragraph 41(1) of the Iraqi Penal Code states that ‘(1) The punishment of a wife by her husband, the disciplining by parents and teachers of children under their authority within certain limits prescribed by law or by custom.’ It may be argued that Paragraph 41(1) of the Iraqi Penal Code is a provision that ultimately prevents women and girls ever seeing justice for the violence they suffered at the hands of Daesh if the marriages between the fighters and the abducted and enslaved women and girls are accepted.

Any legal reforms should include introducing the crime of genocide and other international crimes into the Iraq Penal Code in accordance with international standards (notably the 1948 UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide) to ensure that such atrocities as those aimed at annihilating religious minority communities do not go unpunished.

1.2.Minority Rights

In 2015, the Iraqi legislature introduced a new law, the National Identity Card Law, to say that a child born to one Muslim parent, even if the child is born out of rape, has to be registered as Muslim. The alternative is for the child to be undocumented. Such law is highly controversial and as religious minorities struggle for their survival in Iraq, the law will only prolong their suffering and prevent them from being able to rebuild their lives.

According to Article 26(2) of the 2015 National Identity Card Law, “children... follow the religion of Islam from the Muslim parents.” The law does not appear to say anything about cases where a minority religious woman or girl is raped and therefore enables the interpretation that these provisions still apply. Article 26(1) states that “a non-Muslim may change his religion in accordance with the law.” However, this applies only to the conversion of non-Muslims to Islam and not the other way around. The alternative is not registering the child. However, if the child is unregistered, the child is not able to access various services, including education.

The law, which is contrary to the international standard on the right to freedom of religion or belief, is extremely controversial, especially in light of the genocidal campaign unleashed by Daesh against religious minorities in Iraq, including Yazidis and Christians. Daesh, apart from a litany of barbaric atrocities, has been infamous of using rape and sexual violence as a weapon of war, and as a method

of its genocidal campaign against religious minorities.² In the self-proclaimed Daesh caliphate, women and girls were subjected to horrendous and daily abuse at the hands of Daesh fighters who they were forcibly married to. Some of these rapes resulted in pregnancies. In such cases, under the 2015 National Identity Card Law, the children born to Yazidi women or girls and Daesh fighters, who are Muslim, would have to be registered as Muslim. This has a severe and lasting punishing effect on the future of these children and their Yazidi families.

If the child is registered as a Muslim, and cannot grow up in the religion and culture of the Yazidi community, what future can the child have? If the child is a Muslim, would she or he be accepted into the Yazidi community? This is very unlikely. And indeed, media outlets have reported the heart-breaking dilemma that some Yazidi survivors of Daesh atrocities have had to face - to keep their children born out of rape and raise them as Muslim, away from their families and communities, or leave the children (in orphanages) and return to their communities.³

To address the issue, it is crucial to have Iraqi law amended to ensure that children born to Yazidi women and girls and Daesh fighters would not, by default, be registered Muslim, but could be registered as Yazidi and be able to grow up in the religion and culture of their mothers. Such an amendment to the law could help the survivors of Daesh atrocities rebuild their lives and guarantee their children a better future. Furthermore, such an amendment could also help all minority women and girls and their children born out of rape as it would acknowledge the victim's religion and allow the children to grow up in their mothers' religion.

2. Myanmar

The recent atrocities perpetrated against Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar (and against other religious minorities in Myanmar) require investigation and the prosecution of those responsible. The atrocities have included the forcible deportation of over 700,000 people from Myanmar to Bangladesh 'through

² Indeed, as indicated in the International Criminal Tribunal for the Rwandan case of *Prosecutor v Akayesu*, rape and sexual violence constitute a genocidal method under Article II of the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide:

"In patriarchal societies, where membership of a group is determined by the identity of the father, an example of a measure intended to prevent births within a group is the case where, during rape, a woman of the said group is deliberately impregnated by a man of another group, with the intent to have her give birth to a child who will consequently not belong to its mother's group ... rape can be a measure intended to prevent births when the person raped refuses subsequently to procreate, in the same way, that members of a group can be led, through threats of trauma, not to procreate." (*Prosecutor v Akayesu* (Judgment) ICTR-96-4-T (2 September 1998), 507.)

³ Louise Callaghan, 'Freed Yazidi sex slaves forced to leave Isis children behind', *The Times* (17 March 2019). Available: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/freed-yazidi-sex-slaves-forced-to-leave-isis-children-behind-gf3fvhvgd>.

a range of coercive acts and that great suffering or serious injury has been inflicted on the Rohingya through violating their right of return to their state of origin.’⁴

The International Criminal Court (ICC) is already looking into the atrocities after on November 14, 2019, Pre-Trial Chamber III authorized the Prosecutor to proceed with an investigation.⁵ The court has recognized its jurisdiction to consider the situation even though Myanmar is not a party to the Rome Statute. Similarly, the International Court of Justice (the ICJ) will be considering the atrocities perpetrated in Myanmar, after the Gambia initiated proceedings against Myanmar.⁶ Yet, it will take many years before some of those responsible for the atrocities face justice. However, the long pursuit of justice should not distract us from advocating that other steps be taken to ensure that the minorities that were targeted by the recent atrocities are safe in Myanmar and can re-establish their lives.

One change which is urgently required in law and policy reform. To address the issue, the International Commission of Jurists, in cooperation with the International Panel of Parliamentarians for Freedom of Religion or Belief (IPPFoRB), produced a report identifying laws that may have contributed to the persecution of religious minorities in Myanmar as we know it today.

The report identifies colonial-era blasphemy laws as a source of some of the recent challenges. It concludes that these laws have resulted in restrictions of the right to freedom of speech, particularly through the ‘Protection of Race and Religion Bills’ in 2015. The report emphasizes how the blasphemy laws have been used and abused to convict individuals even where there is no evidence of intent to insult a religion or of incitement to violence, hostility or discrimination on religious grounds. Blasphemy laws are always a controversial subject as they are highly subjective. However, where the laws of procedure and due process are not followed, blasphemy laws are a significant threat to religious minorities.

The report further discusses the ‘Protection of Race and Religion Bills’, four laws adopted in 2015 that affect both religion and ethnicity in Myanmar, namely, the Buddhist Women Special Marriage Law, the Religious Conversion Law, the Population Control Law, the Population Control Law, and the Monogamy Law. The Buddhist Women Special Marriage Law regulates marriages between Buddhist women and non-Buddhist men, imposing an obligation to register such marriages and imposing obligations on non-Buddhist husbands (under the threat of sanctions). The Religious

⁴ ICC, ‘Statement of the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court as delivered at the press conference in Dhaka, Bangladesh’ (18 July 2019). Available at: <https://www.icc-cpi.int/Pages/item.aspx?name=190718-otp-statement-bangladesh>.

⁵ ICC, Bangladesh/Myanmar. Available at: <https://www.icc-cpi.int/bangladesh-myanmar>.

⁶ The Gambia, Application to the ICJ. Available at: <https://www.icj-cij.org/files/case-related/178/178-20191111-APP-01-00-EN.pdf>.

Conversion Law regulates conversion by imposing an extensive approval process. The Population Control Law legalizes the introduction of special zones with population control measures. One such population control measure is a ‘three-year birth spacing.’ The Monogamy Law bans polygamy.

Among the laws, the Religious Conversion Bill is the most controversial piece of legislation as it significantly affects the right to freedom of religion or belief. According to the Religious Conversion Bill, under Section 5, individuals wishing to convert are subject to burdensome paperwork, providing personal information and reasons for converting to a new religion. Upon receipt of the application, the Registration Board will review it and arrange for an interview (if the application is complete). The approval can take up to 90 days (although that period may be extended by up to a maximum of 180 days, on request by the applicant). The Religious Conversion Bill further incorporates some vaguely worded prohibitions, including:

14. No one is allowed to apply for conversion to a new religion with the intent of insulting, degrading, destroying or misusing any religion.
15. No one shall compel a person to change his/her religion through bonded debt, inducement, intimidation, undue influence or pressure.
16. No one shall hinder, prevent or interfere with a person who wants to change his/her religion.

At the time the laws were considered by the legislature in Myanmar, the UN expressed several concerns regarding the laws, especially because they were discriminatory against religious minority groups.⁷ In 2014, the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Heiner Bielefeldt, and the UN Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues, Rita Izsák, warned about the dangers of the then draft Religious Conversion Bill stating that it would impose a cumbersome application and approval process for conversion and disproportionate criminal sanctions for the offence.⁸ Nonetheless, the draft was subsequently adopted and continues to operate. As the new report suggests, these laws need to be repealed to provide a chance to religious minorities targeted for discrimination and persecution in Myanmar.

Lastly, the report identified other challenges, including ‘highly discriminatory legal arrangements for citizenship and the rights of residents in Myanmar’, ‘arbitrary restrictions on places of worship, mostly for Christians and Muslims’ and ‘preferential treatment of Buddhism, for example in the

⁷ OHCHR, ‘Myanmar “needs urgently to get back on track”’ (25 February 2015). Available at: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=15610&LangID=E>.

⁸ OHCHR, ‘UN rights experts raise alarm on draft bill imposing restrictions to religious conversion in Myanmar’ (20 June 2014). Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=14988&LangID=E.%2520See%2520also%2520A/HRC/28/85>.

national school curriculum' as yet extra challenges contributing to the dire situation of religious minorities in Myanmar.

The aforementioned laws must be repealed and/or aligned with international standards to ensure that religious minorities stand a chance for a normal life, or life in the first place, in Myanmar. Without such changes, one cannot make any promises to the discriminated and persecuted religious minorities of a future in Myanmar.

3. China

3.1. The Situation of Uighur Muslims

In October 2018, the Chinese government introduced a new law aimed at addressing extremism that may be seen as legalizing the reported re-education camps. The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Deradicalization Regulations aims to contain and eliminate extremism. Article 3 defines extremism as the 'expressions and behaviours that are influenced by extremism, rendering radical religious ideas, and rejecting and intervening in normal production and life.' Furthermore, 'extremism... refers to the propositions and actions of inciting hatred, inciting discrimination, and advocating violence by distorting religious teachings or other means.' The definition contained in Article 3 is a very vague concept which may incorporate any activities that differ from the 'normal production and life' in China. Relying on the concept of extremism has always been challenging, even in countries with decent human rights records like the United Kingdom. Yet in a country, like China, with a poor human rights record, can only lead to an increase in human rights abuses.

The in Article 9 prohibited activities include activities to 'promote and disseminate the idea of extremism', 'intervening in normal cultural and recreational activities, rejecting or rejecting public goods and services such as radio and television', 'Generalizing the concept of halal, expanding the concept of halal to other fields outside the field of halal food, and rejecting and interfering with the secular life of others by the name of the truth', 'Not allowing children to receive national education and hinder the implementation of the national education system', 'publishing, printing, distributing, selling, producing, downloading, storing, copying, consulting, exchanging, holding articles, publications, audio and video containing extreme content', 'Deliberately interfering with or undermining the implementation of the family planning policy', and 'Other extreme speeches and behaviours.'

With the vague definition of extremism, the list of prohibited activities in Article 9 sets an incredibly dangerous precedent. Indeed, these activities refer to practices that would otherwise be allowed in accordance with basic rights to freedom of expression, freedom of religion or belief (and especially

religious manifestation or the parental right to educate their children in accordance with parent's religious beliefs). All are protected under international standards. (Although, it is noteworthy that while China signed the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in 1998, it has never ratified it.)

The new law identifies what deradicalization may involve. Article 14 of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Deradicalization Regulations refers to the types of centres recently reported in the media and suggests that to combat extremism, it is crucial to

combine individual education with vocational skills education and training centre education, combine legal education with helping education activities, ideological education, psychological counselling, behaviour correction and learning of national language, the combination of learning law, learning skills, educational transformation and humanistic care will enhance the effectiveness of educational transformation.

Following Article 33 of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Deradicalization Regulations:

Educational performance training institutions such as vocational skill education and training centres shall carry out national common language writing, laws and regulations, and vocational skills education and training, organize and carry out extremist ideological education, psychological correction, behaviour correction, and promote the thinking of educated and trained personnel. Transform, return to society, return to the family.

It is clear that the new law dealing with the concept of extremism is excessive and so invites its abuse. Virtually any activity could fall within the scope of the provisions. The reported re-education centres, whether justified by the new law or not, constitute a gross violation of a litany of human rights and are specifically targeted at eradication of the religious minority group in China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. This is a clear example of a counter-extremism narrative going too far and of its abuse to justify the forced conversion of Muslims minorities in China.

The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Deradicalization Regulations must be repealed and all detainees must be released.

3.2. The Situation of Falun Gong Practitioners

Over recent years, several researchers (including lawyers and investigators) have been raising the issue of forced organ removal in China, namely, the illegal practice of removing organs from individuals who did not consent to it. Despite China arguing that approximately 10,000 organ transplants are being conducted in China per year, all following the law, researchers suggest that this is far from the truth. Indeed, researchers indicate that the numbers of such transplants are closer to

between 60,000 and 100,000 a year, significantly higher than the official Chinese estimate.⁹ Furthermore, researchers make a clear case that the vast majority of the unreported cases of organ transplants are the illegal practice of forced organ removal. This is predominately from prisoners of conscience, particularly religious minorities including Falun Gong, Tibetan Buddhists, Uighur Muslims and unregistered House Church Christians.

When imprisoned, they are subjected to abuse and torture and there appears to be no possibility to redress. As researchers suggest, many of them are subjected to forced organ removal. However, it is important to emphasize that the issue is not only about organ removal without consent or valid consent. The evidence suggests that the prisoners of conscience do not survive the forced organ removal as vital organs are removed. Hence, it may be more accurate to talk about killings by way of forced organ removal.

The issue of forced organ removal from prisoners of conscience in China is gaining some attention, including at the European Parliament, in the US, Canada, the UK and many more states. However, one of the most significant challenges is the lack of a smoking gun. The victims of forced organ removal in China cannot tell their stories. The bodies are not found. There is no one piece of evidence.

In response to this challenge, the China Tribunal, an independent people's tribunal to inquire into forced organ removal from prisoners of conscience in China, has been established to consider the evidence of such practice, classify the atrocities and recommend future actions.¹⁰ The China Tribunal heard from several witnesses who, despite not being the victims of forced organ removal (as the allegation is that no victims have survived the procedure), have identified important elements explaining the practice. For example, a female Falun Gong practitioner who was imprisoned and tortured for several years told China Tribunal how medical professionals were examining Falun Gong practitioners but not any other prisoners. The woman had a heart problem what ironically appears to have saved her life. She added:

In the end, every Falun Gong practitioner had been given a medical check-up and had his or her blood tested. Even those who had developed a mental disorder were not exempt. Other, non-Falun Gong practitioner prisoners didn't have to go through this. At that time, I already knew that the medical check-ups were not for our health. After the exams, I discovered that some practitioners had disappeared; I didn't know where they went...I never heard from the practitioners who were transferred. I understood

⁹ David Kilgour, Ethan Gutmann and David Matas, 'Bloody Harvest/The Slaughter' (22 June 2016). Available at: https://endtransplantabuse.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Bloody_Harvest-The_Slaughter-2016-Update-V3-and-Addendum-20170430.pdf.

¹⁰ See: China Tribunal. Available at: <https://chinatribunal.com/>.

the reason for these medical tests after I heard about the CCP harvesting organs from living Falun Gong practitioners. Then I understood the depth of their deceit.

This was not an isolated statement. Indeed, other witnesses identified similar practices of medical examinations (including blood tests, x-rays and ultrasounds) of Falun Gong and the disappearances of them without a trace. One witness, when asked why Falun Gong would have been picked for the examinations (and possible forced organ removal), identified that Falun Gong practitioners are very healthy and healthier than others in the Chinese prisons.

China must urgently cease the alleged practice of organ harvesting and ensure that such atrocities are investigated and the perpetrators prosecuted.

3.3. The Situation of Christian Minorities

Christians have also been subjected to various methods of discrimination and persecution in China. The treatment complained of includes the closures of churches, the ban on the sale of bibles online, the removal of crosses and the arrest of priests and worshipers. Reportedly, there are plans to ‘contextualize’ the Bible to make it more ‘culturally acceptable’ and Christian preaching is to be adapted to include the core values of socialism.¹¹

This situation will only deteriorate. China recently revised its Religious Affairs Regulations. As a result, the right to freedom of religion or belief has suffered significant restriction. For example, the regulations state that citizens can enjoy the freedom of religious belief but that no organization or individual may compel other citizens to believe in, or not to believe in, any religion.

While the provisions appear not to have any practical implication upon the enjoyment of the right, the empirical reality suggests otherwise. The concept of ‘compelling’ others may be abused to include scenarios where religious organizations provide humanitarians assistance, housing or other support and such support is considered to forcing others or compelling others to convert. Indeed, such an argument has been used as a means to persecute in other countries.

Another example of the recent deterioration is the requirement for religious groups to register with the relevant bodies. Similarly, building or using a place of worship must be registered as well. The process may take a very long time. Without such registration, any meeting of an already registered religious organization would be illegal and would trigger legal consequences, including a fine or even arrest. Furthermore, religious organizations cannot be run by foreigners. This prohibition also applies to foreign funding.

¹¹ Open Doors, China. Available at: <https://www.opendoorsuk.org/persecution/countries/china/>.

China must repeal the provisions limiting the right to freedom of religion or belief, and associated rights, or align them with international standards.

4. Nigeria

Boko Haram is a Salafi-jihadi Muslim group which emerged in 2003. Boko Haram's crimes are widespread geographically and vary greatly in magnitude. Boko Haram is based in north-eastern Nigeria but is also active in Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. The attacks are not random and are directed against anyone who opposes Boko Haram's ideologies or supports western values. Boko Haram specifically targets Christians as 'non-believers'.

Attacking women and girls is a signature tactic of Boko Haram; it subjects women and girls to physical and mental abuse, rape and sexual violence, forced labour and many more. The impact of these crimes is devastating. Even if the women and girls survive the abuse and are free, there are various challenges that they will then face. The abused women and girls may struggle to reintegrate into society because of the stigma associated with the nature of abuse suffered. Women and girls may struggle with mental or physical injuries requiring medical assistance and counselling that is often not available in the region.

Among the abducted girls, Leah Sharibu, a 15-year-old Nigerian girl, was one of the 110 schoolgirls abducted by Boko Haram members from their school in Dapchi, Nigeria.¹² Even though all of the girls have now been released, Boko Haram refused to let Leah go. According to one of the other girls, Leah declined to renounce her Christian faith.¹³ This is the reason Boko Haram continues to enslave her. The fact that Boko Haram continues to enslave Leah, despite having freed all other girls, suggests that they may not let her go until she renounces her faith.

Nigeria needs to ensure that all cases of atrocities perpetrated by Boko Haram are duly investigated and prosecuted. When doing so, Nigeria must pay special attention to cases where the atrocities are perpetrated because of the religion or belief of the religious minority groups. Nigeria must also do more to ensure the return of all those abducted by Boko Haram.

¹² Stephanie Busari and Bukola Adebayo, 'More than 100 girls missing after raid on Nigerian school' CNN (26 February 2018). Available at: <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/02/25/africa/nigeria-boko-haram-father/index.html>.

¹³ Bukola Adebayo, 'Parents anxious for release of only Dapchi schoolgirl still held by Boko Haram' CNN (27 March 2018). Available: <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/03/27/africa/nigerian-parents-schoolgirl-release/index.html>.

5. North Korea

In 2013, the UN Human Rights Council established the Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (Commission of Inquiry)¹⁴ to investigate the systematic, widespread and grave violations of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, including to ensure 'full accountability, in particular where these violations may amount to crimes against humanity.'¹⁵

The Commission of Inquiry concluded that North Korea's egregious violations of human rights make it **'a State without parallel.'** It highlighted the incarceration of an estimated 100,000 North Koreans in gulags, including secret Christians and dissidents whose situation he said was comparable to the Holocaust.

The Commission of Inquiry reported that the leadership had collaborated in crimes against humanity which included:

extermination, murder, enslavement, torture, imprisonment, rape, forced abortions and other sexual violence, persecution on political, religious, racial and gender grounds, the forcible transfer of populations, the enforced disappearance of persons and the inhumane act of knowingly causing prolonged starvation.

The Commission of Inquiry made several comments on the violation of the right to freedom of religion or belief in North Korea, and among others, found that 'apart from the few organised state-controlled churches, Christians are prohibited from practising their religion. Christians caught practising their religion are subject to severe punishment in violation of the right to freedom of religion and the prohibition of religious discrimination'¹⁶, and clear evidence of 'inhumane acts as murder, imprisonment and torture, persecution; and systematic and widespread attack under State policy.'¹⁷ Indeed, in evidence to the British Parliament, one Christian woman who escaped prison said that she had been forced to eat dung and treated like an animal and another that **'not a single day passed without some form of torture'** – with Christians singled out for the worst treatment of all. Despite a handful of Potemkin churches to provide the illusion and façade of State permitted religion, in a seventy-year lockdown, North Korea has persecuted believers on an unimaginable scale.

¹⁴ UN Human Rights Council, 'Situation of human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea', 9 April 2013, A/HRC/RES/22/13. Available at: https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/a_hrc_res_22_13.pdf.

¹⁵ Ibid., 5.

¹⁶ UN Human Rights Council, 'Report of the detailed findings of the Commission of Inquiry on human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea', 7 February 2014, A/HRC/25/CRP.1, 264. Available at: https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/a_hrc_25_crp_1.pdf.

¹⁷ Ibid., 1090 ff.

Even though the Commission of Inquiry has made several recommendations on how to address the situation, these have not been followed. Among others, Mr Kirby's report called on the UN to consider taking those responsible to the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity. Fear of vetoes in the UN Security Council has led to no action being taken.

North Korea must ensure that the right to freedom of religion or belief is adequately protected and enforced.

6. Pakistan

According to the Movement for Solidarity and Peace (MSP), a human rights organization working within the country, around 1,000 Christian and Hindu girls (and women) are kidnapped each year. These girls and women are usually between the ages of 12 and 25. These religious minority women and girls are often abducted, forced to convert, forced to marry Muslim men, and abused.

In one of the cases, it is alleged that Huma Younus, a Christian girl, was abducted from her parents' home in Karachi on October 10, 2019¹⁸, by a man named Abdul Jabbar of Dera Ghazi Khan, Punjab Province.¹⁹ Younus, born on May 22, 2005, was 14 years of age at the time of the alleged abduction. A text message was allegedly sent to Younus' parents stating that she had converted to Islam and had married Jabbar "of her free will." As reported in the media, on February 3, 2020, the High Court of Sindh in Karachi, Pakistan, "dismissed a petition to have the marriage and forced conversion of a Catholic girl overturned", stating that a girl is ready to marry after she has had her first period.²⁰

At the end of April 2020, a 14-year-old Christian girl, Myra Shehbaz, was reportedly abducted and forced to marry in Faisalabad, Punjab. According to International Christian Concern, "Myra Shehbaz was abducted by a group of Muslim men led by Muhammad Naqash."²¹ Eyewitnesses claim that Myra was attacked while she was travelling to her work as a domestic worker on Sunday afternoon. Pervez Masih, Younas Masih, and Naeem Masih, the eyewitnesses, claimed that Myra's abductors forced her into a car and that Myra tried to resist. These eyewitnesses were unable to help Myra because abductors were armed and fired several shots into the air." Myra's mother, Nighat, told International

¹⁸ Morning Star Pakistan Correspondent, 'Court in Pakistan Validates Forced Conversion, Marriage of Christian Girl to Muslim' Morning Star News (12 February 2020). Available: <https://www.christianheadlines.com/blog/court-in-pakistan-validates-forced-conversion-marriage-of-christian-girl-to-muslim.html>.

¹⁹ Shafique Khokhar, 'A 14-year-old Christian girl is kidnapped and converted in Karachi. Her parents appeal to the Court of Justice' Asia News (12 March 2019). Available at: <http://asianews.it/news-en/A-14-year-old-Christian-girl-is-kidnapped-and-converted-in-Karachi.-Her-parents-appeal-to-the-Court-of-Justice-48714.html>.

²⁰ Morning Star Pakistan Correspondent, 'Court in Pakistan Validates Forced Conversion, Marriage of Christian Girl to Muslim' Morning Star News (12 February 2020). Available: <https://www.christianheadlines.com/blog/court-in-pakistan-validates-forced-conversion-marriage-of-christian-girl-to-muslim.html>.

²¹ International Christian Concern, '14-Year-Old Pakistani Christian Girl Abducted in Faisalabad District' (2 May 2020). Available at: <https://www.persecution.org/2020/05/02/14-year-old-pakistani-christian-girl-abducted-faisalabad-district/>.

Christian Concern that she feared her daughter would be “raped, forcefully converted to Islam, or even killed.”

Other known cases from recent years include a Christian girl, Mehwish, who was kidnapped when she was just 14. It was reported that the police have not taken appropriate steps to investigate her case or attempt to rescue her. The same is true in the case of a 13-year-old Christian girl, Sana John. Two teenage girls, Farzana and Sehrish, aged 14 and 16 respectively, were abducted and subjected to gang rape perpetrated by three Muslim men. Even though one of the perpetrators was apprehended, the family was pressured to settle the case outside of court. Similarly, the case of Maria Sarfraz, an 11-year-old girl abducted and gang-raped for three days, was forcibly settled out of court.

There are more similar cases of minority girls being abducted, forcibly converted and married. These cases show that Pakistan is still far behind ensuring that its laws and practice are in accordance with international standards. Pakistan must introduce laws criminalizing forced conversion as in cases identified above. Police officers must undergo training to be equipped to deal with cases of minority religious women and girls who are abducted, forcibly converted, forcibly married and abused. Pakistan must ensure that the laws on child marriage are duly enforced.