

PAKISTAN: Christians, Hindus and Muslims from Lahore: We need a law against forced conversions

By Shafique Khokhar

Asia News (03.04.2019) – <https://bit.ly/2CR0pFB> – Every year in the country at least 1,000 minority girls are forced to recant their faith and convert to Islam. Christian demonstrator: “It is a disgrace that forcible conversions are not considered a violation of human rights”. Activists of religious groups and civil society also demonstrated in Faisalabad.

We need “a law against the frequent episodes of kidnapping, forced conversions and forced marriages of Hindu women and girls, Christians and other religious minorities”. Pakistani Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh and lay activists organized a Protest Camp in Lahore, facing the Punjab Assembly on March 30th, while a similar event took place in Faisalabad (see video) .

The initiative is inspired by the abduction of two Hindu sisters, forcibly converted and forced to marry two Muslim men. The participants affirm: “The minorities are afraid. A law must be passed to eliminate forced conversions “.

The phenomenon is not new and has deep roots in the rigid radical Muslim mentality and patriarchal traditions. According to the most recent surveys, every year at least 1,000 girls are forced to recant their faith and adhere to Islam. In the last 40 days this fate has happened to nine minors belonging to Hindu and Christian minorities.

The protest rally was led by Rwadari Tehreek [*Inter-religious Movement for Tolerance*, ed.], In collaboration with various religious and civil society associations. Activists call for the arrest of Mian Mithu, guardian of Barchundi Sharif in Ghotki district, and Ayub Jan Sarhandi, of Sarhandi mosque in Umerkot district. These are influential Islamic religious leaders, implicated in numerous cases of abduction and conversion, against which no provision has ever been adopted.

Samson Salamar, president of Rwadari Tehreek, says: "This horrible trend leaves minorities in a state of misery, pain, terror and insecurity. All this goes against international standards on human rights and against the Constitution of Pakistan, which guarantees religious freedom to every human being without discrimination".

Saeeda Diep, president of the *Institute for Peace and Secular Studies*, adds: "Conversions to Islam in suspicious circumstances are a source of grave concern and spread even more terror and anger among minorities, already victims of other discriminatory forms".

According to Tariq Siraj, head of *Human Rights Concern Network*, "we need to launch an awareness campaign in civil society". For Katherine Sapna Karamat, director of Christians 'True Spirit,' it is a misfortune that many do not consider conversions extracted by force as a violation of human rights".

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