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Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

Written statement* submitted by Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[20 August 2020]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.

Minorities in Pakistan and the threat of extremist ideologies

Ethnic and religious minorities in Pakistan are suffering from discrimination, intolerance, abuse and massive human rights violations. The discrimination against religious minorities is institutionalized because the Constitution of the country highlights that all citizens are equal under the law but in reality, non-Muslims are blocked from holding government office. Many religious minorities as Christians, Ahmadiyyah or Hindu, are confronted with the abuse of discriminatory blasphemy laws which sanction violence against them. Every month new cases of arbitrary blasphemy accusations are documented. Most of these cases are going unreported because the families of the accused have got death threats from extremist Islamists and are staying silent for fear of retaliation.

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan recently declared that religious minorities remained unable in the year 2019 to enjoy the freedom of religion guaranteed under the Constitution. The Commission documented numerous cases of forced conversions and false blasphemy accusations against Hindu, Ahmadiyyah and Christians. Many of these abuses were linked to the extreme poverty, minorities are suffering from. Pakistani Christian converts are living in extreme danger to be persecuted for apostasy. Thousands of them fled to Thailand, where they fear deportation.

Not only Ahmadiyyah, but also liberal Sufi Muslims are threatened by violence of extremist Islamists. Sufis in Sindh Province are complaining about widespread terror and killings. Sufi shrines are devastated by brutal attacks of terror groups or Sufis are indiscriminately killed by extremists.

Hindus are very much concerned about their lack of political representation, bonded labor, arbitrary blasphemy accusations, kidnappings, forced conversions and killings. Hindus, Christians and other religious minorities have called on the Government of Pakistan, to develop and implement more strategies to effectively combat religious intolerance and to strengthen dialogue in Pakistan. Muslims and other religious groups will not secularize, therefore it's of important urgency to find solutions on the ground to ensure the respect of the freedom of religion for all religious groups. Judicial provisions as the articles limiting the religious freedom of Ahmadiyyah people should be abolished.

But to ensure religious freedom the abrogation of discriminatory laws is not sufficient. Religious extremism in the Pakistani society is deeply rooted. To guarantee the respect of the Constitution and the enshrined liberties it is important that Pakistan Government strengthens its control of education especially in Koran schools or academies. Islamic organizations in Pakistan had agreed in the year 2019 to put some 30,000 madrassas or seminaries under the supervision of the Ministry of Education to curb violent extremism in the country. The madrassas have been blamed for the rising radicalization of Pakistan's youth. This important process has to be strengthened and more supported by the influential military.

Furthermore, the state authorities have to ensure that hate and religious intolerance will no longer be encouraged by education materials or media.

Society for Threatened Peoples calls on the UN Human Rights Council to urge the Government of Pakistan:

- to fight against religious intolerance and hate speech against ethnic minorities to ensure that minority people are safe and free from discrimination, abuse and violence,
- to abandon arbitrary blasphemy laws,
- to guarantee the respect of fundamental freedom rights for all minority people,
- to strengthen dialogue between ethnic minority and majority people,
- to enhance the reform of the madrassas and Islamic seminaries in order to curb hate speech and religious extremism.