

UN Human Rights Council - 21th Session
13 September 2012

Item 3: Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences

Speaker: Budi Tjahjono

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Madame President,

Franciscans International (FI) welcomes the Annual Report of the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences and would like to draw the attention of the Special Rapporteur on the issue of servile marriage linked to cultural and religious practices.

In Pakistan, children, especially those belonging to the minority groups, are often under threat of being kidnapped and forced to get married, becoming in this way a “commodity over whom any or all the powers of ownership are attached,” as stated by the Rapporteur.

Girls are more frequently victims of this practice to which, sometimes, forced conversions are related. Forced conversions enhance the link between the new household and the girls. This makes nearly impossible for them to escape from a slave-like life.

Girls belonging to religious minorities, especially in Southern Punjab, Northern Sindh and in various parts of Khyber Pakhtun Khwa, feel particularly insecure. In addition, girls of these communities are convinced that if they do not convert, they might get killed. In the case of kidnapping of religious minorities for forced marriage, the court fails to protect the victims. It recognizes only the legitimacy of the marriage under the official state religion. It has been a serious concern among the religious minorities in Pakistan.

Franciscans International is particularly concerned about the recent decision of the Government of Pakistan to cut the budget allocated for education and also having a bias attitude in their education curriculum. We strongly believe that the issue of forced and servile marriage should be addressed also through providing school curriculum which promotes tolerance; respect for human rights and take into consideration the integral development process of girls.

Therefore Franciscans International urges the Government of Pakistan to:

- 1. Respect the principles and obligations enshrined in all human rights conventions and treaties to which Pakistan is party and modify the national legislations accordingly.*
- 2. Increase the budget allocated to education to put in place reforms aiming at improving the existing school curricula which should provide good quality education for all regardless of their faith and culture, promote tolerance and respect, and address the issue of religious fanaticism.*

Thank you.