



AN HRCP FACT-FINDING REPORT



# NORTHERN SINDH

IN SEARCH OF SOLUTIONS

# **Northern Sindh: In Search of Solutions**

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Human Rights Commission of Pakistan

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# 1 Introduction

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) has closely monitored the political and human rights situation in Sindh for over two decades, leading high-profile fact-finding missions to the region every few years and calling the attention of successive governments to citizens' legitimate demands—including access to health and educational facilities, restoration of law and order, protection to vulnerable groups such as women and religious minorities, an end to enforced disappearances and other curbs on fundamental freedoms. Due to the overwhelming number of complaints received from northern Sindh in recent years, it was decided to conduct this mission in certain districts of northern Sindh.

This mission, which took place during 14-18 February 2023, comprised chairperson Hina Jilani, vice-chair Sindh Qazi Khizer Habib, Council member Sadia Bokhari and senior activist Imdad Chandio. Mr Asad Butt represented HRCP as co-chairperson of the organisation, and Ms Sana Zaman Butt, HRCP staff member, accompanied the mission as rapporteur. The team visited Ghotki, Mirpur Mathelo, Kandhkot, Jacobabad, Larkana and Karachi, where it held a series of consultations, focus group discussions and key informant interviews. The mission concluded with a press conference held in Karachi on 18 February 2023 to present its preliminary findings and observations.

Broadly, the mission's mandate was to:

- Asses the overall state of human rights in northern Sindh, with a particular focus on the rights of vulnerable groups.
- Understand the local context of gender-based violence, particularly harmful customary practices, which continues unabated.
- Document the rights violations faced by members of religious minorities, specifically the nature and extent of forced conversions.
- Assess the overall state of freedom of expression and association, access to education and healthcare, land rights and labour rights enjoyed by various groups in the region.
- Evaluate the enforcement of law and enjoyment of social, economic and political rights against a backdrop of feudal powers over the revenue, judicial and police functions of the state machinery.
- Identify the pathways, or the lack thereof, for access to justice for victims of human rights abuses, in particular members of marginalised communities.
- Determine the state of flood-affected communities in the aftermath of the 2022 floods, and the progress of rehabilitation efforts in areas concerned.
- Examine initiatives of the district and provincial governments to address the violations identified above, and the degree to which the issues have been raised with duty-bearers.

During its mission, HRCP spoke with civil society members, lawyers, journalists, students, workers, activists and political leaders. The team also met a number of government functionaries, including the senior superintendent of police (SSP) for Ghotki, Tanveer Hussain Tunio; the additional deputy commissioner (ADC-II) for Ghotki, Majid Hameed; the deputy director of the Department of Women Development in Jacobabad, Khalida Soomro; the deputy commissioner of Larkana, Rabiya Siyal; and the deputy commissioner of Qambar Shahdadkot, Saleemullah Odho. This report draws primarily on respondents' oral testimonies and key informants' analysis of the human rights situation. HRCP is grateful to all those respondents who took time out to speak to the team or helped obtain information on the situation of human rights in northern Sindh, and hopes to undertake another mission on the situation of human rights in southern Sindh in the future.

## 2 Violence against women

The predominant concern brought to the mission's notice pertained to the endemic violence against women. Harmful customary practices continue to command uncritical acceptance, particularly in the shape of *karo kari* [honour killings]. According to one respondent, a bulk of the reported attacks occur close to the provincial border-belt of Balochistan in the cities of Kandhkot and Jacobabad. The mission was told that the victims in these cases included underage girls, married women and even elderly women. A women's rights activist from Rohri attributed the victimisation of elderly women largely to property disputes where they had asserted their right to inheritance. Complainants also lamented the unyielding tradition of adjudication by the all-male *jirgas* or village councils—an institution of tribal elders and religious clerics under the patronage of feudal landowners—that compelled individuals to carry out illegal sentences, including death to women. While the councils or *jirgas* were declared unlawful by the Supreme Court in 2019, recourse to law provided little to no relief either.

One lawyer in Kandhkot related his inability to lodge first information reports (FIRs) and initiate legal proceedings for eight such incidents of honour killings. The mission further noted that, in many cases of honour killings, efforts to file applications under provisions 22-A and 22-B of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) to seek case registration and transfer of investigative powers remained futile as well.



*Meeting with civil society representatives at the District Council Office in Kandkoth*

The team received alarming reports of gender-based violence crimes—including physical and sexual assault, abductions, premature burials and murders—a majority of which went unpublicised. One incident raised with the mission involved the kidnapping of a 24-year-old pregnant woman Nazia Khoso, daughter of Rasheeda Khoso, and her two-year-old daughter Kausar near Kandhkot. An FIR under the Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA) has been registered, as well as one for kidnapping and murder, against the accused perpetrators from the Bangwar tribe. This incident has received a great deal of local attention, with human rights activists from the area demanding effective action to recover the abducted woman and her daughter. These activists also held a demonstration to protest against the non-recovery of the abductees only a few days after the mission's visit to the area. Instead of allaying the concerns of the family and protesting public, the police registered cases under the anti-terrorism law against

many of the protestors, including Imdadullah Khoso, a Kandhkot-based member of HRCP's governing Council. According to the information received till the filing of this report, the woman and her daughter were not recovered, and those who held a peaceful protest for her recovery continue to face prosecution for charges under the ATA. According to unverified reports, the woman who was pregnant at the time of her abduction gave birth to a still-born baby during her captivity. HRCP remains deeply concerned about this case and finds the performance of the local law enforcement in affording protection to women subpar, coupled as it is with a serious violation of people's right to peaceful protest.

Kidnappings of women and girls are also a result of escalated tribal clashes. Two members of the Shar community from the town of Ubauro in Ghotki claimed that women of their clan were targeted in such a clash, and remain under threat of harm as retaliation to 'dishonour' their community through violence against these women.

The mission was informed that some victims of these gruesome attacks have been killed and their bodies found in riverine areas. Residents in Ghotki were of the view that the *kacha* region of Sindh—the floodplains adjacent to the banks of the River Indus—is an infamous site for dumping bodies, especially that of women and children. Scores of victims trafficked across Punjab and Balochistan are also reportedly found slain in the *kacha* area of district Kashmore, which borders the two provinces. One non-governmental organisation (NGO) worker from the region pointed out that the lack of female doctors and forensic experts to perform medico-legal autopsies and post-mortem examinations of female victims precluded the bereaved families or individuals associated with the victims from acquiring a medical certificate and thus hindered the prosecution of these cases.

One police official from Ghotki alleged that law enforcement authorities retaliated against him and his uncle, also a police official, while they were pursuing the investigation of their female relative's kidnapping. According to him, the police initially refused to register the FIR and then registered an FIR with false information in order to deflect investigation of the case. The policeman claimed that his uncle was suspended from service for by-passing his superiors in pursuing the case, and he and his family were implicated in several false cases as retaliation.

In a meeting with Ghotki Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Tanveer Hussain Tunio, the mission questioned him about these allegations. The SSP refuted the allegations and reported that the said officials had committed arson and looted the property of the suspected abductors. He maintained that the measures enforced against them were disciplinary and commensurate with their actions in this context. Be that as it may, the mission remains concerned that not only was the victim still missing, but prosecution against the accused was still pending till the conclusion of the mission.

When the mission asked about the low rate of convictions in honour killings, the SSP maintained that a lack of witness testimonials meant that cases were often based on circumstantial evidence, resulting in failed prosecution. However, he asserted that the Sindh police's data reflected a decline in incidence of honour killings over the past year (the Sindh police reported 98 honour killings in 2022 as opposed to 120 in 2021 in response to HRCP's request for information).

The SSP, nevertheless, admitted that citizens often viewed police work with considerable scepticism. He confirmed that no policewoman was employed in the Ghotki district police office despite 233 open vacancies seeking woman law enforcement officers. In his opinion, female applicants do not meet the eligibility criteria pertaining to academic qualifications. However, many women are actively prohibited from joining the police by tribal consensus as well. A female official of the Department of Women Development in Jacobabad mentioned that there were only four women police constables in the

Jacobabad city police, of whom two were assigned on standby duty while the other two retained ceremonial offices.

The mission was informed that women account for a disproportionate amount of domestic abuse victims and survivors. For instance, a female political activist in Kandhkot narrated the story of her sister's murder at the hands of her husband and in-laws after being accused of theft of domestic fowl, whereupon she was tied to a charpayi<sup>1</sup>, assaulted and held captive for four hours. The respondent complained of a disturbing level of police apathy and claimed that the inordinate delay in their response led to her sister's death.

Amid claims of the police's recurrent failure, the mission found that there is a dearth of accessible and safe shelter homes for victims. Women shelter homes, better known as *dar-ul-amans*, fall under the domain of the Sindh's Department of Women Development and are dysfunctional and understaffed. Of the four facilities in the province, two are situated in northern Sindh in the cities of Larkana and Sukkur. According to reports, women seeking shelter there are forced to traverse long distances at their own peril, as they are often under threat of physical harm. The women in these shelters face a lack of medical care and legal assistance due to the shelter's limited financial resources. They also experience constrictive living conditions due to a lack of rooms, and high-handed behaviour from the management and staff who are frequently left untrained.

However, the deputy director of the Department of Women Development in Jacobabad, Khalida Soomro, claimed that provisional legal assistance and vocational training in collaboration with NGOs, such as Rozan, was provided within the shelter houses. She also said that most of the training and recreational courses were contingent on receiving funds for such short-term projects. According to Soomro, approximately 90 percent of the women in shelter houses are involved in settlements of honour crimes.

Women and girls continue to face insurmountable barriers to quality education, such as a lack of female-only educational institutes. The general secretary of the district bar association in Kashmore-Kandhkot, Advocate Abdul Ghani Jamali, disclosed that primary schools for girls were scarce and no degree colleges for girls existed near the district. Families were also reluctant to allow women and girls to exercise public mobility given the rampant spread of gender-based crimes, an unease especially espoused by members of religious minorities. Respondents from Kandhkot further denounced the lack of women in police, judicial courts and other essential professions.

The mission lauded the efforts of civil rights organisations to make women's right to education attainable as an encouraging sign. An activist in Kandhkot spoke of her work in a women's rights organisation that launched campaigns in Mirpurkhas to encourage the re-enrolment of school drop-outs, as well as cultivating decision-making skills in adolescents. The additional deputy commissioner (ADC-II) for Ghotki, Majid Hameed, also spoke of strides made by the Sindh Education Foundation, a government agency, in expanding the reach of educational programmes to girls from underserved communities.

Women's political participation, however, faces similar impediments as girls' education, fuelled by tribal intimidation and warnings imparted by male political leaders. A female political worker from Badin, who claimed to be the first woman to run in the local bodies' elections, told the mission about the threats her family received from her political opponent, an influential *sardar* in the area.

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<sup>1</sup> A traditional woven bed used across South Asia.

Lawyers in Kandhkot also recounted assembling as many as 1,200 people on International Women's Day on 8 March 2022, with women attending as far as from Quetta, to march and convene a rights' awareness seminar. While the occasion was a success, a series of *fatwas* [religious edicts] were issued against the participants of the demonstration by some local clerics. An Aurat March was organised in Ghotki as well.

The mission observed substantial inequities in access to healthcare for men and women, noting that the nearest gynaecological centres were located in urban city centres like Larkana and Sukkur. A lawyer in Ghotki stated that women in labour often die enroute to the closest hospital, which is at a distance of at least 30 kilometres from the city.

### 3 Religious minorities

Sindh has the unique distinction of hosting the highest population of Hindus in the country in its rural areas, followed by the Christian, Sikh, Parsi, Kalash and Buddhist communities. The mission was able to meet representatives from the Hindu and Christian communities, lawyers, teachers, students and political workers throughout the mission. On one such occasion, the mission met with the Hindu residents of Meghwar Mohalla, a colony comprising at least 50 houses and over 500 Hindu residents, in the town of Sarhad, district Ghotki. From this meeting, the mission observed that despite claims of social cohesion, religious minorities in northern Sindh felt vulnerable to violations of their rights due to institutionalised discrimination, arbitrary blasphemy accusations and faith-based conversions.



*Meeting with Hindu residents of the Meghwar Mohalla colony, Sarhad, Ghotki*

Civil society actors in Ghotki labelled their district as an epicentre of forced conversions, with several high-profile cases emerging from the region in the past. They mentioned the alleged involvement of local politician and Muslim cleric Mian Abdul Haq, more commonly known as Mian Mithu, in forced conversions and coerced marriages. According to them, the *pir* is notorious for using his clout and state-backed connections to harbour converts in his seminary Dargah Barchundi Shareef, situated further afield of Daharki, Ghotki. It is alleged that Mian Mithu's seminary is involved in the abductions of underage Hindu girls who are then forcibly converted and married off to Muslim men. Mian Mithu's reported claim—that the girls marry and convert of their own volition—was vehemently rejected by the Hindu families who pointed out that most of the victims are not of age. They also question why Hindu boys do not feel the necessity to renounce their faith.

Few feel empowered to take a stand against Mian Mithu and his nephew, Mian Muhammad Javed, who has grown to serve as a central figure in alleged abductions alongside his uncle. Respondents told the mission how fear-stricken citizens held back from mobilising protests during the case of Simran Kumari in late 2020, who was reported missing from her aunt's house in Mirpur Mathelo when, as per the family, she was 17-years-old. Her family was later informed that she had approached Mithu's shrine to accept Islam, adopting the name Ayesha and marrying a Muslim man on the same day. The seminary also announced Simran's age as 21-years-old. In January 2021, an additional sessions judge issued a court order prohibiting Simran's family from retrieving their daughter. A Ghotki-based lawyer expressed regret at the reluctance of the legal fraternity to take up Simran's case, stating that it was subject to multiple referrals. A resident of Jacobabad also revealed that he was the sole Muslim among

18 people who publicly aired their grievances regarding the case and were therefore indicted under fabricated charges.

While the Sindh Child Marriage Restraint Act 2013 sets the legal minimum age of marriage at 18 years and criminalises underage marriage, members of religious minorities feel it has done them little good. Community leaders say that the provincial legislation is bypassed by trafficking victims from Sindh to Punjab, where the legal age to wed remains 16 for girls. They cited the kidnapping and forced conversion and marriage of two Hindu sisters, Reena and Raveena, in March 2019 who were moved to Rahim Yar Khan by armed disciples linked to Mian Mithu. The family had claimed that they were underage, but the Islamabad High Court permitted them to live with their Muslim spouses.

Some respondents were of the view that the families of forced converts refuse to meet their girls or accept their return. Alarming, consent by underage girls was also defended by authorities entrusted to recognise and protect the rights of children. In a meeting with the mission, a former child protection officer in Jacobabad conceded that a bulk of forced converts were underage, but shared his conviction that they were drawn to Islam or converted after ‘falling in love with a Muslim man’. Hindu residents of the Meghwar Mohalla colony did not divulge any issues pertaining to forced conversions, although the mission noted that the presence of a Muslim facilitator during the dialogue may have inhibited their liberty to discuss openly.

SSP Ghotki Tanveer Tunio maintained that the complaints registered by members of religious minorities were given precedence over other criminal matters. He also stated that in his six-month tenure, his office had received no reports of forced conversion. He alluded to the relocation of victims from Sindh to Punjab, explaining that such cases fell out of his legal jurisdiction and the ambits of the Sindh Child Marriage Restraint Act. The deputy commissioner of Qambar Shahdadkot, Saleemullah Odho, relayed his attempts to convince the alleged converts to return to their parents, but remarked on his inability to interfere once they recite the declaration of faith, saying that it ‘becomes a matter of our own respect’.

The mission observed with considerable alarm the acute impact on young minority girls as a consequence of their vulnerability to forced conversions. Freedom of movement for Hindu and Christian women and girls is restricted, depriving them of the chance to attain education: residents of Meghwar Mohalla revealed that not a single girl in their community attends school for ‘fear of kidnapping’.

An elected Hindu local councillor in Jacobabad opined that the female literacy level has worsened over the years. He stated that the medical college SMK Institute of Nursing in Shikarpur admitted one Christian girl in this academic year compared to at least 15 admissions of Christian girls roughly 10 years ago. In his efforts to circumvent the gap by launching vocational programmes for girls at one of the city churches, he found parents more willing to send girls to their own religious community centres. There is additionally a growing trend of underage marriages amongst Hindus as families rush to marry their daughters in attempts to stave off the likelihood of forced conversions.

Attacks on minority places of worship are reportedly frequent. Respondents speaking to the mission expressed anger and grief over the three consecutive episodes of temple vandalism in Ghotki in 2019. In other places, they complained of the non-availability of land for the construction or expansion of Hindu temples. Members of the Meghwar Mohalla community stated that their colony temple could barely accommodate more than two individuals.

Instances of misuse of blasphemy law are worryingly recurrent, and many a time underreported. Hindu leaders decried the life imprisonment sentence handed down by a sessions court to Nautan Lal in 2022, a Hindu teacher at the Government Degree College Ghotki who was accused of blasphemy by a secondary school student in a 2019 video shared widely on social media. The teacher was additionally fined PKR 50,000. An advocate in Ghotki stated that no lawyer was willing to defend the teacher at the time.



*A Baptist church pastor in Jacobabad expressed concern regarding women voters' safety*

Complainants from minority communities, while speaking to the mission members, asserted that they were forced to police their speech, interactions and practices. The mission was concerned to learn of an incident where a Ghotki-based Hindu boy was charged with *zina* (unlawful sexual relations) by the father of a Muslim boy who reportedly discovered that the boys had embraced. According to respondents, the family of the Hindu boy was fined PKR 50,000 in a court settlement. Some Hindu locals described an implicit sense of being unwelcome at social gatherings or political congregations. Other examples of discrimination were far more overt, like being served food and water in distinct vessels better known as *soneri* cups, glasses or dishware at Muslim hotels and their place of work throughout the province. Miti Kumar, a lawyer, rued that he was frequently other-ised as a non-Pakistani and his identity conflated with Indian nationality. 'I own my country,' he proclaimed bitterly at this sense of disownment. The frequency of these incidents against religious minorities appear to be symptomatic of the pervasive behavioural and systemic barriers that reinforces their segregation from community life. Lawyers at Kandhkot reported that several Hindu families from Kashmore had even left the country in the past year.

Unemployment rates among religious minorities remain starkly high and are indicative of the government's failure to mainstream them into the workforce. Sindh has reserved a five percent job quota for religious minorities, but its implementation remains weak and inadequate. Across the 500 inhabitants of the Meghwar colony, it was pointed that there was a sparse enrolment of only four men through the minorities' quota. Consequently, the political representation of minorities remains minimal. Members of the Meghwar community said that only one Hindu had assumed political office in the last by-elections in the Ghotki district, within the Daharki union council under a party ticket of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP). A pastor of the Baptist church in Jacobabad, added that women did not feel safe to venture out and cast votes in the district elections either. A local councillor observed that women from minority communities constitute a substantial vote bank and their participation in the electoral process could play a significant role in advancing minority interests.

## 4 Law and order

The effective enforcement of law remains crippled in northern Sindh which continues to be rife with organised crime, militant violence, a significant lack of governance and accountability, and exploitative feudal power systems. The maladministration at the hands of the police, judicial and revenue functions of the state constitutes a formidable challenge to this area in many respects.

A number of criminal cases were reported to the mission involving murders, abductions, land occupation and tribal clashes. A widely-shared concern plaguing citizens and police services alike pertained to the illicit operations of dacoit gangs, including kidnappers, along major highways and the *katcha* areas of the province. Sindh's *kacha* area, which lines the banks of the River Indus for thousands of acres — from Kashmore to Dadu on one side, and Ghotki to Moro on the other — is particularly notorious for criminal activity and is reportedly a haven for high-profile kidnappers. Characterising it as a highly dangerous zone, respondents in various areas that the mission visited stated that they tend to stay clear of this land for fear of being abducted. According to SSP Ghotki Tanveer Tunio, at least 300 cases of kidnapping for ransom were registered in the past year, where the hostages largely report being 'honey-trapped' through phone calls, texts or social media platforms. The practice has swelled into a profitable trade, claimed to be estimated at PKR 1 billion every year. The SSP said that the police were unequipped to counter the criminals, primed with civilian-grade firearms such as pistols and submachine guns at best. The dacoits, on the other hand, are armed with military-grade, high-calibre weapons and even anti-aircraft guns which can be used to shoot down aircrafts, forcing the police to retreat from their hideouts in the difficult geographical terrain of the *kacha* area.

Respondents that the mission met seemed to disagree with the police narrative, maintaining that hundreds of check-posts line the heavily militarised provincial borders. They suspected the collusion of security forces in enabling the flow of arms, stating that the police are reneging on their state duties. The locals also expressed their reservations regarding the sophistication of weaponry at the disposal of law enforcement agencies. According to them, the criminal gangs operate under the aegis of influential leaders who have substantial financial interests in limiting access to the *kacha* areas.

Worryingly, children are often the targets of these repugnant attacks. A respondent from Kandhkot, narrated the incident of the kidnapping of three-year-old Junaid Ahmed Bakhrani in July 2022 in broad daylight from Madrassa Mohalla in Tangwani, Kashmore. Civil society actors, religious leaders and political activists came in droves to protest the kidnapping for 41 uninterrupted days, appealing to the police and apex courts. Reportedly, the continued protests culminated in the recovery of the child, though the residents lamented that the media coverage accorded to the incident was scant. In another similar incident, seven-year-old Shoaib Soomro was abducted in January 2023 from the Pirzada Colony, Larkana, and held for a staggering ransom figure. Civil society members confirmed that, despite assurances, no FIR has been lodged yet for the case. Instead, a non-cognisable report (NCR) was lodged—a note that the police have no powers to investigate such a complaint. Also in Larkana, the case of nine-year-old Sahil Korejo, who was kidnapped for ransom in 2015, remains pending. In addition to kidnappings, the mission observed the pervasive victimisation of children in cases of sexual abuse. An activist in Jacobabad cited at least 19 known cases in the past year.

The human rights defenders that met the mission bemoaned the complicity and negligence of the police which, coupled with legislative loopholes and harassment by suspected offenders, constrained case resolution and convictions. The mission was concerned to learn of the murder of Anwar Saeed, a Kandhkot-based resident, leaving behind four children. His mother Khanzadi Sheikh told the mission that one person had been nominated against the charges, but nothing came out of the case.

Acknowledging the excessive number of criminal cases, the Ghotki police welcomed the recent introduction of a WhatsApp police complaint and feedback system by the Inspector General of Sindh police to facilitate the speedy registration of complaints or FIRs. According to the SSP Ghotki, the police officials now ensure that the complainant's grievances are filed through consistent check-in calls and follow-ups with the parties involved. The Mission, however, observed that no one from the public and civil society actors mentioned this initiative, indicating either lack of its efficacy or public awareness of this mechanism. The SSP also mentioned that the sheer burden of cases means that forms of community policing have to be stepped up, although he failed to elaborate further on this.

### *Extrajudicial killings*

One way that the police appear to expedite action is the unlawful practice of killing suspects in 'encounters' or while in police custody. Extra-judicial killings are prevalent in northern Sindh, enjoying a degree of acceptability as part of a crackdown on dacoit gangs. One journalist recounted 15 extrajudicial killings in Ghotki in the month of February 2023 alone. Citizens expressed resentment over such excessive and indiscriminate abuse of force outside of the judicial process in the name of maintaining law and order.

These extra-legal killings are largely framed as police encounters where, as per their own claim, the police are forced to resort to self-defence in shoot-out situations. SSP Ghotki Tanveer Tunio advanced the same view, pointing out that the police suffer losses too. He referred to the martyrdom of five police officers, including a deputy superintendent of police (DSP), two station house officers (SHOs), and two constables, on 6 November 2022 as a result of an attack by dacoits on a police camp in the *katcha* area near Raunti in Ghotki. The SSP also indicated his dissatisfaction with the arraignment of suspects and case prosecution, stating that the conviction rate of offenders remains extremely low. 'Most of the suspects are let off on bail within a month's span. The mind-set of the judiciary is wired to release criminals,' he remarked.

In Jacobabad, multiple respondents informed the mission of several incidents of unlawful detainment and extrajudicial killings. Most of them maintained that law enforcement personnel enjoyed almost complete impunity as neither the so-called encounters nor accusations of arbitrary detention were ever fully and impartially investigated or prosecuted. The mission also noted that views such as those expressed by the SSP Ghotki points towards a mindset that condones acts of law enforcement agencies that are considered crimes against humanity under international law. This lack of accountability is not confined to northern Sindh alone, and remains a serious concern to human rights defenders throughout the country.

### *Tribal clashes*

Many citizens reported feeling troubled by the incidence of tribal feuds, including revenge killings and rapes of women from rival tribes, which play a significant role in the conflict dynamics of the province, particularly in northern Sindh. Respondents stated that the Kashmore district is the worst-affected, with ongoing clashes between 30 tribes. Another alleged that at least 15 people are killed every day in the district. The presence of tribal conflicts appears to paralyse socio-economic development in these areas, damaging property, inhibiting mobility and leading to school closures.

### *Feudalism and the state: occupation of land in the kacha area and beyond*

In northern Sindh, the colossal power base of feudal landowners, amassed through generational wealth and exploitative cycles of debt bondage, continues to allow them excessive influence over state functions and apparatus. Citizens are keenly aware of their social and political impotence in the face of

the arbitrary rule of the landlords, alleging that the police operate on the 'payrolls' of influential political persons. The human rights defenders that the mission met maintained that the criminal gangs operating out of the *kacha* area are propped up by powerful landholders as well as state institutions for self-serving interests.

While the *kacha* area is uninhabitable for the most part due to flooding, giving rise to small islands in the terrain, the receding waters leave dry and highly fertile land behind. The area contains abundant supplies of fish, wheat, milk, water, and wood and timber from the swathes of riparian forests. The resource-rich reserves of the land make it highly sought after by landowners, tribal leaders and military forces, the respondents informed the mission. A member of the District Bar Association Kashmore-Kandhkot asserted that the economy within the *kacha* area is valued at at least PKR 80 billion per year. Respondents alleged that at least four districts in northern Sindh are subject to excessive land occupation and deforestation by *patwaris* at the behest of the military and *sardars* of the landed gentry.<sup>2</sup> Often, the land is acquired from the 'illegal occupation' of a local influential person or squatters, private owners or the Sindh Forest Department. However, residents argue that the modalities of land allotment are severely misrepresented; the agricultural, commercial and residential land is seized from native civilians without financial compensation and branded as state land.

A respondent in Kandhkot told the mission of a lodge owned by a feudal family which was cleared after military personnel alleged that the surrounding land needs added security, setting up a check-post in the territory. The mission was particularly alarmed to hear allegations of the forced eviction of families in the town of Sarhad in Ghotki district by the Sindh Irrigation Department. According to one local, people were told to immediately evacuate a sizeable proportion of a residential locality in Sarhad with the promise of re-allotments and monetary reimbursements. Reportedly, a whole family, including women and children, were also approached by *patwaris* and physically assaulted by armed men. A woman from the family told the mission that her husband was tied up and battered, and force was deployed against them, including her children. The family was unable to get medical assistance and are said to be currently homeless.

The disinheritance of residents in Ghotki extends to their communal centres as well. A lawyer further alluded to the occupation of a city library by a local influential person, as well as a school by military forces. Local people complained that obtaining a land registration certificate from the Sindh Revenue Department had become far too costly at a whopping fee of PKR 25,000, as opposed to earlier fees of PKR 3,250.

### *Enforced disappearances*

The extraordinary use of state force is evident in the form of enforced disappearances in northern Sindh. Citizens are detained without a rightful trial or due process in secret internment centres, ostensibly on terrorism charges. Police authorities discount the issue of missing persons, contrary to the lived experiences of the locals. In Sindh, the practice is used to muzzle political dissent, with those activists targeted who seem sympathetic to independent nationalist movements and criticise the state. Some political activists affiliated to these parties and movements talked about their own illegal detention by law enforcement agencies. One of them claimed that he was picked up from his home, held hostage in a torture cell and assaulted during interrogation, where he was warned against allegiance to nationalist causes and rights-based campaigns.

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<sup>2</sup> Sindh govt. grants 9,600 acres' land to martyrs of Pakistan Army. (2015, June 19). The News International. <https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/5512>

Respondents in Larkana particularly came forth with reports of family members who were picked up without an arrest warrant and with no information of their whereabouts. One woman told the mission of her brother's enforced disappearance six years ago in May 2017. On this day, her 27-year-old brother was working out of his tailor shop when six unknown men pulled up in a black Vigo. Witnesses reported that three uniformed men and three men in plain clothes proceeded to assault and handcuff him in broad daylight, pushing him into the car. Her brother has not been seen since. According to her, a *habeas corpus* petition in the Sindh High Court was filed through her lawyer, and the case was also directed to the Commission of Inquiry on Enforced Disappearances (COIED). She stated that she was forced to travel to Karachi for successive hearings but to no avail. She claimed that she protested nearly every day for three years in Larkana, receiving a string of threatening phone calls and texts. She also mentioned the toll it took on her family, especially her mother who has since twice suffered a heart attack.

In Larkana, the team also heard another woman from Dokri talk about the enforced disappearance of her father who was a farmer, also in May 2017. Their legal counsel fought the case for some time in Circuit Court Larkana, but the family was unable to pursue the case due to financial constraints. The case is presently with the COIED, but there has been no progress.

SSP Ghotki Tanveer Tunio dismissed the incidence of enforced disappearances, claiming that their veracity is highly disputed. He told the mission that people tend to lie and fabricate complaints for indeterminate personal gains. Tunio stated that he haghots personally proven the non-existence of a person alleged to have been forcibly disappeared, and that another case brought to his desk involved the disappearance of a deceased person who had passed years before.

The mission observes that the position taken by the SSP is completely contrary to the information reported in the print media and that received by HRCP over the years regarding enforced disappearances of political activists, journalists and human rights defenders in different parts of Sindh. Many of the reported cases remain unresolved to this day.



*HRCP chairperson Hina Jilani in conversation with families of victims of enforced disappearances*

## 5 Access to education and health

Infrastructure inequities and financial exclusion throw into sharp relief a sustained imbalance in the allocation of resources in Sindh. Most respondents in northern Sindh claim that the province's remote localities and riverine areas are characterised by low literacy levels since educational institutes are few and far between, making the commute difficult for students and teachers. Primary schools far outnumber secondary schools, stunting the development of education beyond elementary levels. Schools in northern Sindh villages are often closed on account of tribal conflicts. One respondent alleged that they are known to become functional only during election periods to swing votes. Those that exist are in a reportedly abysmal state, lacking adequate water, electricity, toilet or seating facilities, and marked by teacher absenteeism. In addition, the hindered freedom of movement precipitates gaps in access to education for girls and religious minorities.

Residents expressed disappointment at the existence of thousands of government-run 'ghost schools' in northern Sindh, with hundreds in the district of Kandhkot alone. These non-functioning entities exist on paper or as empty compounds, with some deserted buildings allegedly taken over by local landlords for their personal use. A member of a prominent NGO active in the region, who was also part of a third-party monitoring survey his organisation conducted in 2016, told the mission that government rosters displayed 1,499 primary schools and 68 higher-secondary schools in Kashmore. His 25-member team was assigned to track and digitally catalogue the location for each of these institutes. However, they were unable to find at least 358 schools. According to him, these ghost schools had school management committees and teachers who continued to draw salaries, adding that during the course of the survey 28-30 schools were opened after he reached out to the authorities. Civil society members blamed the provincial government for rampant corruption, mismanagement and bureaucratic red tape that left the state of education in abject decay.

The mission also observed that the financial challenges associated with paying school tuition fees and other costs of education placed profound burdens on low-income families struggling to send their children to schools. While the Sindh Education Department touts its efforts to expand inclusion through free public education, many colleges, schools and staff members are reportedly demanding unreasonable, and allegedly illegal, fee amounts. Many schools in northern Sindh still remain submerged after the devastating 2022 floods. In the wake of economic despair and loss of livelihoods, families find it hard to send their children to school. Local people believe that this risks perpetuating child labour and unemployment cycles. They also fear that the absence of rights' awareness through education feeds into breeding tribal conservatism and militancy in a region already restive.

A key concern underscored was the lack of adequate health facilities. A number of People's Primary Health Initiative (PPHI) centres and at least one small hospital unit exists in Kandhkot, which is understaffed, poorly-resourced and seldom has doctors available on-duty. Residents are compelled to travel to larger urban cities such as Larkana and Sukkur for surgical treatment. Women face exceptional health issues in accessing gynaecological centres, and residents reported that pregnancy-related deaths were not uncommon. One respondent called for on-ground implementation of the Reproductive and Healthcare Rights Act 2013 which aims to lower maternal mortality by providing services for pregnant women such as quality antenatal and postnatal care and professionalised obstetric care. Many are growing frustrated with the lack of access to clean water, increasingly more so with standing floodwater that is accelerating the transmission of diseases such as malaria and dengue. A resident of Ubauro (a town in district) alleged that a cohort of state-owned and multinational companies with factories based in their tehsil are violating environmental codes and poisoning their water, giving rise to hepatitis B and hepatitis C.

## 6 Employment and public service delivery

There is brewing resentment against the lack of livelihood opportunities and civic amenities for local residents, particularly in Ghotki and Kandhkot which are credited with the largest oil and gas fields, power projects and fertiliser plants in the country. Over a 100 gas deposits – first discovered by the Mari Petroleum Company in 1956 – exist in Ghotki. A local journalist cited at least five sugar mills and four power plants in Ghotki, noting the dichotomy since residents face electricity shortages themselves. The president of Ghotki's district bar association alleged that the average daily wages for workers ranged between PKR 500-600. Kashmore, a right bank district, is considered the least developed district in Sindh despite the presence of Pakistan's largest public-sector thermal power plant on its land. Residents lament the lack of irrigation water, despite the presence of mega-irrigation structures. Kashmore is additionally located on the proposed China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) route, touching Dera Bugti of Balochistan in the north. Many expressed outrage at the stone crushing plants at Dera Bugti and Kashmore, which generates lofty revenues for CPEC without providing the benefit of adequate employment to local people.



*Meeting with the community at Ghotki Press Club*

## 7 Journalists' security and freedom of expression

The mission was alarmed to note frequent curbs on freedom of press in northern Sindh, including fatal attacks on journalists, *mala fide* FIRs and tactics of intimidation to suppress dissent. According to media personnel, live news coverage is wilfully curbed by police checks and often endangers their lives, for instance, a cameraman for a local news channel informed the mission that he narrowly escaped being shot at twice during police fire on the frontlines of media reporting in Larkana. Police allegedly attempt to deter press coverage by threatening and brutalising journalists. Reporters also claim that the content published or broadcasted is subjected to severe controls by the proprietors and editors; in order to highlight a human rights violation then, they attempt to submit the particular news item repeatedly in the hopes that it will be published.

Journalists additionally risk threats and fabricated FIRs for reportage on subjects related to erosion of civil liberties. For example, the mission was told about the Ghotki police's alleged extortion against a journalist from a local daily newspaper who reported on the eviction of Hindu families from a flood relief camp in Mirpur Mathelo in September 2022.<sup>3</sup>

Compounding the problems of security are the meagre salaries journalists and mediapersons allege receive. In some cases, camerapersons receive as less as PKR 6,000 per month. Inflationary surges in fuel costs are difficult to adjust in their incomes, putting their work travel on hold. Many journalists also alleged that their earnings are sporadic: local press agencies hold up salaries for months on end, pushing journalists to seek alternative sources of livelihoods, such as land-related jobs or retail businesses.

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<sup>3</sup> R. Piracha. (2022, September 13). Ghotki journalist faces court case over flood reportage. Voicepk. <https://voicepk.net/2022/09>

## 8 Climate change governance

The mission expressed its reservations about the pre-fabricated houses in Qambar Shahdadkot, which are presently being built in the same flood-prone areas and pose glaring risks to its prospective owners, raising questions about whether any site suitability studies were conducted for housing or not.

The team also noted with concern that despite the passage of seven months, many flood-affected victims were still left without proper shelter or monetary compensation. 90 houses were said to have been completed as opposed to the 142,629 houses that had been partially or completely debilitated in Qambar Shahdadkot. In Larkana, 132,627 houses stood damaged or destroyed with no housing work or tangible funds in sight since the Karachi conference held for flood rehabilitation in February. Deputy commissioner of Qambar Shahdadkot Saleemullah Odho emphasised the importance of establishing the integrity of the needs-assessment phases. He admitted that the data validation took time, but appeared hopeful that it would pay off, assuring the mission that the disbursement of funds will begin soon. Larkana's deputy commissioner Rabiya Siyal agreed, stressing that the transparency of implementation work was essential to uphold. She recounted the rigorous application-based data entry in the door-to-door surveys that took place, claiming that the field staff documented the national identity card numbers of every family affected, photographed every damaged house and uploaded it to the SPHF Management Information System (MIS) to ensure granular and accountable practices. This was followed by an equally exhaustive verification phase to substantiate the beneficiary information collected.

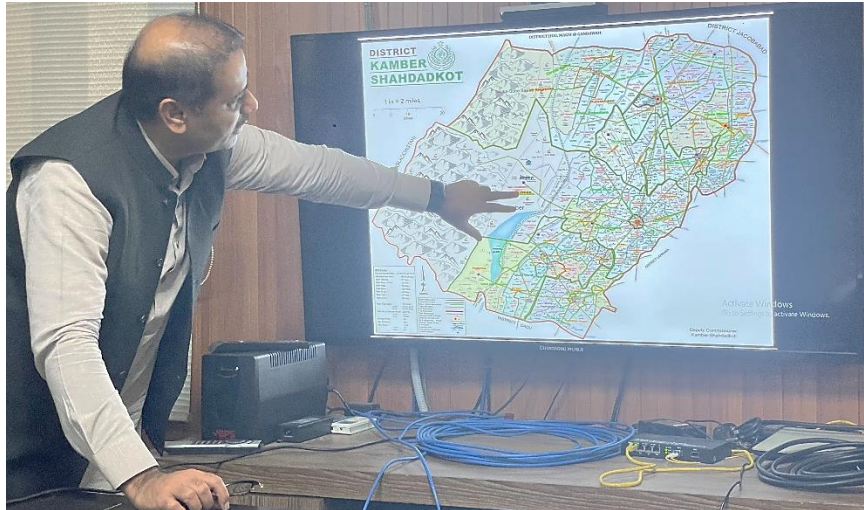
The lack of public accessibility of the survey data was another matter of concern for the mission, given the essential requirement of a process that is both fair and transparent. In the time since the fact-finding mission, HRCP is dismayed to learn that a third verification survey is on the cards as the flood-affected communities continue to sleep out in the open. Sana Khoja, spokesperson of the SPHF, reportedly expects funds distribution to begin in May 2023.<sup>4</sup> Many residents fear that the appropriation of funds will boil down to election gimmicking at the cost of their lives.

The mission heard of many initiatives that were undertaken during the floods, especially those in the recovery phase that saved many lives, as well as ongoing rehabilitation and resettlement programs that the government is undertaking. The mission's members also realise that the government must have faced extreme challenges that would render even the maximum extent of efforts taken as inadequate in dealing with a disaster of this scale. There can also be no disagreement with Saleemullah Odho's contention that efforts on the government's part will always remain inadequate in a resource-deficient country. At the same time, the mission has noted the increasing public frustration with respect to some important aspects of this situation.

It was pointed out in several consultations held during the mission that the flood impact could have been blunted. Respondents decried years of poor ecological governance in their districts, recounting that they have grown up seeing floods through 1976, 1988, the 1990s, 2007 and 2010. The state's lack of attention to water structures has echoed through history, despite the fact that the urgency for more sophisticated drainage and irrigation systems in Sindh's catchment areas and rice crop fields has continued to exist for decades.

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<sup>4</sup> R. Abro. (2023, February 24). Flood victims wait for reconstruction assistance. The Express Tribune. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2402923>



*Meeting with the deputy commissioners of Larkana and Qambar Shahdadkot at the Larkana commissioner's office*

Apart from naturally occurring breaches in swollen water systems, complainants heavily censured the execution of a series of deliberate breaches in various drainage arteries meant to 'ease the flow of water' in targeted areas and accelerate its release into the River Indus. They believe that many influential locals in Sindh and Balochistan planned the cuts to turn water away which threatened their lands and put their lives at risk. One instance frequently quoted was the move to instil cuts in the Larkana-Sehwan (LS) Bund and Manchar Lake's protective dyke to avert the course of water away from Sehwan Sharif, a taluka in Jamshoro district and home to one of Pakistan's renowned Sufi shrines, the shrine of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar. Mr Odho explained that Sehwan Sharif – which was surrounded by three channels – and the towns of Jhangra and Bajra were protected as an exceptional municipal strategy to safeguard heritage and tourism. However, residents firmly contested that the disastrous cut was made purely for self-serving interests, since Sehwan Sharif is the hometown and constituency of the Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah. Geographically, the cut was made at least 12 kilometres away from another one made back in 2010, which some believed was hardly prudent. One respondent elaborated that water coming from Larkana and Talpur, crossing into the Manchar Lake and accumulating next to the Indus Link Canal along the LS Bund was unable to clear away through the canals around Sehwan. The cut, however, inundated other areas off the course of the water, wreaking great damage onto their lands. The water also spilled onto the Indus Highway, killing at least 50 people. At the time of the mission, it was reported that the same breach had not been plugged yet.

## Damage and rehabilitation post the 2022 floods: The government's response

The mission met with the deputy commissioner of Larkana, Rabiya Siyal, and the deputy commissioner of Qambar Shahdadkot, Saleemullah Odho, to investigate the extent of damages incurred by the 2022 floods which disproportionately impacted Sindh, particularly its north-western districts. The mission also sought to examine the status of recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts for flood-affected communities by the local and provincial governments in the wake of the enormous loss of life, displacement, destruction of property, loss of agricultural land and livestock, health epidemics and debilitated infrastructures of transport, irrigation and communication.

The additional deputy commissioner (ADC-II) of Ghotki, Majid Hameed, further apprised the team of relief efforts in the district of Ghotki. In the course of meeting district authorities and civil society members, the mission was informed of the exacerbating factors that scaled the devastation, particularly compounding the suffering of different vulnerable groups. HRCP deeply appreciates the time given by these officials to the mission for this session.

### *Qambar Shahdadkot*

Saleemullah Odho set out a comprehensive profile of the flood-related damages and activities underway in the district of Qambar Shahdadkot which shares borders with three districts of Balochistan to the west, Dadu to the south, Larkana to the east and Jacobabad to the north. He clarified that the district, with a total population of over 1.341 million, comprises seven *tehsils* and 52 union councils. As of 31 August 2022, the observed flooded area was spread over at least 598,150 acres in the district, inundating 256 villages. By 10 December 2022, receding waters had left behind 30,509 acres of flooded area over 44 villages. The worst-hit *talukas* that remained at this date were Warah with 11,369 acres underwater and Qubo Saeed Khan with 10,550 acres affected. The flooding experienced in Warah was markedly high, given its location in a ground depression near Hamal Lake.

Mr Odho explained that while a disaster management plan is prepared for each district every year, the sheer amount of rainfall was unforeseen and surpassed their climate-readiness. He said that the provincial government, district authorities and disaster management organs, together with the military services on call, undertook flood response through five sequential stages: rescue, shelter, damage assessment, dewatering and rehabilitation.

Rescue operations for people and livestock continued until mid-November on foot and through boats, rickshaws, motorcycles and any usable means of transport. At least 206 relief camps were established in the district, but issues of overcrowding compelled many to live in makeshift homes. Scores of displaced persons left for urban centres such as Hyderabad, Karachi and even Lahore in search of shelter. Mr Odho pointed out that the uncontrolled evacuation of flood-affected victims significantly hindered the damage assessment stage that followed since it was necessary to base the scale of relief efforts on the findings of the survey. There was no space to cook food within the camps and the delivery of ration supplies encountered many difficulties due to disconnects along the Indus Highway, as well as the Shikarpur Road through Sukkur. Roads to Sehwan and Larkana reportedly opened up in the first week of November. As water began receding after October, flood victims were encouraged to return to their homes with ration bags in stock to initiate the damage assessment phase.

A joint assessment survey was conducted between 20 October 2022 and 25 November 2022 to gauge the extent of damage caused and identify the response measures necessary to rehabilitate the flood-affected communities. Mr Odho presented an appraisal segregated by *taluka* to shed light on the loss of life, houses, shops, infrastructure, crops, schools and other areas affected, as well as the steps taken to contain and counter the devastation.

Complaints pertaining to air-borne, water-borne and vector-borne disease outbreaks soared through the winter with a wave of malaria, dengue, diarrhoea and skin diseases surfacing. The survey recorded an alarming 53 percent positivity rate for malaria among the victims, leading to fumigation efforts carried out by the district unions, local unions and the military. Upon inquiry by the mission, Mr Odho stated that the Sindh government had coordinated with the People's Primary Healthcare Initiative Sindh (PPHI Sindh) to set up 15 mother-and-child care centres in the district to facilitate prenatal care and reduce the maternal mortality rate trailing the floods. He was of the opinion, however, that most people preferred home births by tradition. He also said that three different child nutrition projects were active during this time. After 15 November 2022, district authorities began repatriating the inhabitants of the relief camps with ration supplies and other items in hand.

### *Larkana*

The deputy commissioner for the district of Larkana, Rabiya Siyal, informed the mission of the status of flood-affected communities in her jurisdiction. Larkana, originally founded on the banks of the Ghar Wah Canal, comprises a total population of 1,521,786 across four *tehsils* and 184 villages. The district experienced four spells of incremental rain in the monsoon season of 2022, with the first spell marked by Ms Siyal as taking place between 1 July and 15 July, the second spell between 16 July and 31 July, the third spell between 1 August and 16 August, and the fourth spell between 17 August to 26 August. While the last spell was the shortest, rainfall surged up to twelve times as much as in the third spell. The *taluka* of Dokri received approximately 794 millimetres of precipitation in the fourth spell and the *taluka* of Larkano received up to 757 millimetres. Ms Siyal added that the town of Dokri experienced the second-highest rainfall in the whole province after Naushahro Feroze.

Results of the damage assessment survey revealed at least 696 flood-related deaths and 2,046 injuries took place in the district. Ms Siyal claimed, however, that no death from post-disease outbreaks or starvation occurred in Larkana, with different government and non-government teams acting jointly on-ground. At least 132,627 houses (*katcha* and *pakka*) were damaged partially or in totality. She also reported around 3,302.2 acres of crop, 13,072 livestock heads and 1,036 trees lost to the floods. District authorities instituted 1,354 relief camps and tent cities for provisional shelter, accommodating at least 146,095 displaced persons. Around 183,900 people stayed outside of the camps.

On the rehabilitation front, the deputy commissioner conceded that no disbursements or reconstruction of houses had begun yet, attributing it to the exacting data verification process. She elaborated on the planned scheme of the Sindh government that Mr Odho had referred to, clarifying that they had joined hands with the World Bank to commit financial aid to housing reconstruction under the Sindh People's Housing for Flood Affectees (SPHF).

### *Ghotki*

The additional deputy commissioner (ADC-II) for Ghotki, Majid Hameed, introduced himself as a focal person in relief efforts at the time of the floods. He stated that the district of Ghotki, with a population of over 16 lakhs according to the 2017 census, accommodated up to 1,600 people in temporary tent cities. Mr Hameed was unable to adduce the number of displaced persons in the district, but he maintained that they were only partially affected. He talked about supervising the set-up of one tent city in the area Memon Laandi with at least 231 tents. This facility was closed down on 27 September 2022 following the repatriation of the victims. Another tent city was established in Mirpur Mathelo, which Mr Hameed labelled a 'model tent city'. He described the range of amenities that were available at the disposal of the victims including hair-dressing, contraceptive supplies and swing installations for children. He also acknowledged the World Food Programme's initiatives for targeting at least six of the worst-affected union councils, where 11,000 households were each granted PKR 12,000 per month for three months.

While the mission appreciated the efforts made by the Sindh government during the flood disaster in 2022 and recognises the overwhelming challenge that the government faced at the time, there are some areas of concern that still need to be addressed more comprehensively.

## 9 Recommendations

### Women's rights

- The Sindh government must set up an overarching women's protection system under the district administration by establishing emergency help desks, protection mechanisms and women shelters at the district level.
- The Sindh Commission for Human Rights (SCHR) and Sindh Commission for the Status of Women (SCSW) should undertake a detailed investigation on honour killings and other gender-based crimes, and collect data on the incidence to provide a basis for authentic research and long-term accountability.
- The Sindh government must ensure that there is a similar database for forced conversions of girls, underage marriages and trafficking of these victims to other provinces to solemnise their marriages. The SCHR, SCSW and other civil society organisations must conduct fact-finding missions with detailed reports on these subjects as well.
- Legislators must ensure that there is legal and procedural reform in cases of property disputes that guarantees expeditious and fair disposal of cases, and full protection of women's right to inheritance.
- The Sindh government must urgently recruit women in the police department to increase gender balance, especially against vacancies that remain unfilled, and institute specialised women-led units. The police must also ease eligibility criteria and conduct awareness campaigns to encourage more women to apply.
- The Sindh government must include more women in health departments, especially as medico-legal practitioners to collect evidence and produce autopsy reports in cases concerning female victims.
- The Sindh government must invest in more schools for girls and hire more female teachers on an urgent basis.
- As said above, the provincial government must implement Justice Salahuddin Panhwar's court order and set up shelter homes for women in every district.<sup>5</sup> Rules of business must also be framed under laws related to the Women Protection System for effective oversight and regulation of *dar-ul-amans*. Provision of medical and legal assistance must be bolstered, as well as vocational training. The Social Welfare Department must ensure their staff's availability to obtain a statement of witnesses, as well as ensure the appointment of female psychologists and protection officers.

### Religious minorities

- The Sindh government must institute a special cell within the SCHR to monitor and redress issues related to religious minorities, pending the formation of statutory provincial and national commissions on minorities' rights.
- School curricula must focus on social content that lays the foundation for interfaith harmony.
- Uniform laws prohibiting forced conversions and underage marriages across the country must be promulgated.
- The government must discourage press statements glorifying forced conversions of underage Hindu girls issued by people and by clerics who have been identified and accused of assisting and facilitating such criminal acts.
- The government must take immediate and effective steps against organised groups that target minorities and who enjoy impunity for their discriminatory activities that erode the spirit of religious harmony in Sindh.

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<sup>5</sup> See *Mst. Rehmat Ul Azeem Wd/o Muhammad Abdul Ghaffar v. Province of Sindh and Others* (CP no. 258/2019)

- The growing trend of underage marriages amongst Hindus, especially in Ghotki, Kandhkot and Kashmore, to stave off the likelihood of forced conversions needs to be addressed through awareness campaigns. The government, as well as civil society organisations, must engage with religious minorities on constitutional and legal safeguards available to allay their fears.
- Judicial officers and law enforcement agencies involved in the investigation and prosecution of forced conversion must be sensitised about the civil and political rights of religious minorities.
- The Sindh government must collect reliable facts and figures about Hindu migration from Sindh; the SCHR must conduct a fact-finding exercise to assist the government in this regard.
- The Sindh government must enforce existing job quotas for religious minorities, with zero tolerance for discrimination in job advertisements and recruiting practices.
- Civil society must collaborate with diverse stakeholders, including journalists, universities, religious leaders, youth and women, with the overarching aim of countering misinformation, hate speech and harmful stereotypes of minorities in a bid to maintain the social cohesion and harmony that is a hallmark of Sindh.
- The government must provide safe spaces for social and community networking involving interfaith representation.

#### *Law and order*

- The Sindh government must invest in training workshops for the police to build their capacity in policing vulnerable populations. This may require workshops specifically targeting behavioural and attitudinal changes.
- Accountability measures for the police for non-registration of FIRs, or for not complying with appropriate criminal procedures, must be instituted and followed to the letter.
- The police must strictly maintain its neutrality and refrain from registering cases against innocent persons at the behest of feuding parties.
- A special police unit must be established to handle the critical law and order situation in the *katcha* areas. This unit must be provided with modern and adequate weapons and equipment, and operate free of political interference.
- Considering the alarming rate of extrajudicial killings in districts of northern Sindh, the Sindh government must immediately restrain the police from staging such illegal ‘encounters’.
- The Sindh government must ensure that more people from the local communities are inducted in police forces.
- Public service campaigns must be initiated to emphasise the regressive effects of alternate dispute resolution mechanisms.
- Public service campaigns must also be initiated for target populations, especially vulnerable groups, to increase their awareness of the risks of irregular migration. This should be accompanied with adequate support to the relevant authorities for reintegrating human trafficking victims and vulnerable smuggled migrants.
- The government must invest in improving the knowledge and skills of border management authorities to stop human smuggling and the flow of illegal weapons across borders.
- District administrations, the judiciary and the police must collectively attempt to resolve old feuds and cases expeditiously.
- Land settlement must be carried out by revenue authorities on a priority basis, and all illegally possessed land must be retrieved by the state.
- The government must announce a socio-economic uplift package for the *katcha* areas of the province, including the provision of basic facilities and services like schools, healthcare units, electricity, roads and employment opportunities.

- Administrative and police jurisdictions should be rationalised and harmonised.
- The Home department must ensure more effective collaboration amongst intelligence agencies and enhance inter-provincial coordination.

#### *Enforced disappearances*

- The SCHR must keep track of enforced disappearances, particularly of political activists, journalists and human rights defenders, and maintain a credible database that is publicly accessible. A complaints desk can be established to this effect.
- The SCHR should be a party to all judicial, quasi-judicial or inquiry procedures in individual cases of enforced disappearances before any forum.
- The Sindh government must take responsibility for such egregious rights violations and give financial support to the families of victims of enforced disappearances.

#### *Right to education and health*

- The Sindh government must ensure that there are enough schools for all children and at an accessible distance.
- More schools for girls must be set up, with primary schools for girls upgraded. Institutions of higher education, including colleges and universities, must not be overlooked either.
- The provincial budget must give adequate resources for education on a priority basis until targets are achieved, with sustained resources thereafter for the proper maintenance of school infrastructure and quality of education.
- Ghost schools that consume funds must be found and shut down. The civil society must also come forward to monitor and report the existence of ghost schools or funding allocated to such institutes.
- Gynaecological centres and child care centres must be set up in every district. The Sindh government must also implement the 2013 Reproductive and Healthcare Rights Act.

#### *Climate change*

- A mechanism to gauge rehabilitation and reconstruction for affectees following the 2022 floods must be instituted.
- The government must make an effort towards long-term, sustainable climate solutions, reducing anthropogenic emissions with taxes and emission caps, and instituting stricter deforestation laws.
- Data from surveys should be made accessible on a public archive so that citizens can monitor their cash flows independently and to ensure greater public visibility.