



Jubilee Campaign Submission to the United Nations Working Group on discrimination against women and girls

Non-Compliance with Working Group Recommendations in Egypt, Nigeria, and Pakistan

I. Introduction

Jubilee Campaign would like to raise to the Working Group the situation of Christian women and girls in Egypt, Nigeria, and Pakistan, where their statuses as both faith minorities and gender minorities render them vulnerable to incidents of abduction, forced religious conversion, and marriages.

Could you please document any potential progress or regression in your country/region with regard to gender equality?

Egypt

We welcome the Working Group's continuous engagement with the Arab Republic of Egypt regarding the arbitrary arrests and detention of female human rights defenders, as well as the treatment they receive while in prison.¹ We would like to report to the Working Group one of the most concerning patterns of gender-based discrimination and violence in Egypt whereby Coptic Christian women and girls are routinely trafficked and forcibly married to Muslim men against their free will. There are an estimated fifty such cases annually, 500 within the past decade, and many victims regrettably still remain disappeared to this day. The below information is attributable to one of our partner organizations, Coptic Solidarity.²

Muslim men entice Coptic women and girls - identifiable by their lack of hijabs and their wearing of symbolic representations of the Christian faith such as necklaces - romantic relationships under the guise of legitimate attraction and/or by deceptively promising marriage and a shared future. Perpetrators maintain the true motives until after elopement, at which point the victims learn the reality of their circumstances but have no means to escape due to their "legal" marital ties to their perpetrators, as well as due to the threat of being blackmailed with the release of sexual images and videos taken non-consensually. Victims are usually forced to renounce Christianity and convert to their "husbands"

¹ [United Nations](#), EGY 2/2021; EGY 1/2021; EGY 16/2020; EGY 14/2019; EGY 4/2019; EGY 14/2018; EGY 9/2018; EGY 18/2017; EGY 16/2017; EGY 16/2016; EGY 8/2016; EGY 4/2015; EGY 10/2014; EGY 9/2014; EGY 10/2013; EGY 3/2013; EGY 17/2012; EGY 7/2012; EGY 2/2012; EGY 8/2011.

² Coptic Solidarity, ['Jihad of the Womb': Trafficking of Coptic Women & Girls in Egypt](#), September 2020.

Muslim faith - the majority religion in Egypt - and such conversions are able to be documented on civil documentation due to facilitation from police and government authorities. In typical fashion, victims appear within days in video clips in which they wear hijabs, claim that they had found the True Religion, and demand their families to not look for her; these statements are made under coercion and threat from their ‘husbands’.

Another method of trafficking Coptic Christian women and girls is the use of force and physical domination. Muslim men often map the routines of their victims to determine whether they are suitable victims and at what times and locations they are most vulnerable. Perpetrators cooperate with other Muslim individuals to strategize their plans to abduct chosen women and girls, sometimes by training young Muslim men/boys to seduce the victims and lure them to a location where they can be kidnapped and then forced into conversion to Islam and marriage.

Numerous noteworthy cases include, but are not limited to: (1) 18-year-old Nerges Adel Ibrahim, kidnapped on her way home to school by the cousin of her Muslim friend; (2) pregnant 20-year-old Marina Sami Sahi, abducted while on the way to a prenatal doctor’s appointment, after she had repeatedly received threatening text messages from a Muslim man; (3) 23-year-old devout Christian student Sara Atef, kidnapped while on her university campus after an exam, and appeared in a video to her family claiming to have accepted Islam and married; (4) 39-year-old mother Ranya Abd al-Masih, disappeared and reappeared in a video in which she is emotionally distressed while claiming to have converted to Islam; she was rescued three months later and testified to being subjected to physical and sexual violence; (5) 15-year-old Yustina Magdy Attia, abducted and then rescued twenty days later; (6) 17-year-old Lisa Romani Mansi, kidnapped while on her way to a lesson and her whereabouts remain unknown; (7) 18-year-old Vivian Adel Yousef, failed to return home from school and reported missing by her husband she had married two weeks prior; (8) 20-year-old Meray Girgis Sobhi, never returned home from attending a lesson; (9) 16-year-old Hoda Atef Ghali Girgis, reported missing after attending an Easter festival; (10) 18-year-old Rasha Khalaf Thabet Aziz, abducted while returning from her grandmother’s home following an Easter celebration; (11) 26-year-old mother of two Christine Lamie who went missing days after receiving a threatening Facebook message stating “I will not leave you...I will take you even on the last day of my life”.

Notwithstanding evidence of coercion, deception, and violence involved in these cases, governments and state actors formalize all conversions to Islam as it is considered a progressive step in expanding Muslim population. Police have refused to arrest those men responsible for the abductions and forced conversions, even when the perpetrators themselves have confessed either their direct commission of the crime or otherwise their secondary involvement thereof. Between 1863 and 2008, religious conversions were required to be held during “advisory sessions” with the converts-to-be and their families to ensure that faith conversions were neither coerced nor fraudulent. This procedure was suspended in 2008 and remains defunct.

Nigeria

We welcomed the Working Group’s and other United Nations mechanisms’ communication in February 2021³ to the Federal Republic of Nigeria regarding mass abductions of schoolchildren from the Government Science College Kagara in Niger State, as well as the trend of kidnapping of children in Nigeria which “expos[es] them to a number of risks, including trafficking, sexual and gender-based violence”. We would like to update the Working Group regarding recent cases of concern.

³ United Nations, [UN NGA 1/2021](#), 24 February 2021.

In 2021, Human Rights Watch interviewed 16 married Nigerian girls between the ages of 14 and 19 years old residing in Imo and Kano states; they found that the respondents reported being “denied their fundamental rights to education, a safe dwelling, and freedom from violence, and often do not have access to adequate health care”.⁴

Leah Sharibu, 20, remains the only individual among the group of 100 schoolgirls who were kidnapped in February 2018 from Government Girls Science and Technical School in Dapchi, Yobe State. Leah’s prolonged captivity resulted from her refusal to renounce Christianity and convert to Islam, the religion of the militant group Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). Early next year will be Leah’s sixth year spent in ISWAP captivity; she has over the past few years been forced to marry a militant leader and has given birth to at least two children, both of whom she delivered when she was under the age of 18 years.⁵ Many women and girls who have escaped Boko Haram or have otherwise been released by the group have often been through at least one forced pregnancy and have developed sexually transmitted infections such as HIV/AIDS, Gonorrhea, and Hepatitis.⁶ In addition to sexual slavery and violence, women and girls are confined to domestic servitude, held responsible for cooking, cleaning, maintaining weapons, child rearing, fetching water, and more.⁷

During Jubilee Campaign’s UNGA 76 Third Committee side event titled “On Stemming the Role of Criminal Groups in Contemporary Slavery within Nigeria”, Mr. Teyei Pam of International Committee on Nigeria (ICON), revealed that while Boko Haram has historically been at the forefront of mass kidnappings and enslavement of women and girls, Fulani militants have played a greater such role in recent years. Mr. Pam’s cousin’s six-year-old daughter was kidnapped by Fulani militants following an attack on a community; it is unknown what type of slavery the girl was forced to endure, but usually women and girls are retained by militants as sexual and domestic servants until large ransom sums are paid for their release.⁸

In December 2022, Reuters published a series of stories in which they revealed that, in an alleged effort to combat Islamic insurgency and identify militants, the Nigerian military has committed violence against women and extrajudicial killings of unborn and living children. In one fragment of this operation, Nigerian soldiers conducted covert, unsafe, illegal, and forced abortions on at least 10,000 pregnant women and girls. The military specifically targeted women and girls who had been previously kidnapped by Islamic State West Africa Province/Boko Haram and subjected to rape in captivity; military forces consider these unborn children as future Islamist insurgents that must be eradicated. Unconscionably, the pregnant women and girls were neither informed of the procedure prior to the abortion, nor were they asked consent for the terminations; a substantial portion of victims have expressed that they wanted to carry their children to term and raise them. Survivors have reported being drugged and physically threatened into submission for forced abortions – often committed in unsanitary military barracks – and injected with medications that occasionally caused infections and overdose-related deaths of women and girls. This years-long atrocity was kept under wraps for so long largely because survivors were threatened with death should they reveal what they endured.⁹

Also in late 2022, it was reported that 34 out of the total 36 Nigerian states had domesticated the 2015 Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act, which increases protections of Nigerian women

⁴ Human Rights Watch, “[Nigeria: Child Marriage Violates Girls’ Rights](#)”, 17 January 2022.

⁵ Sahara Reporters, “[Leah Sharibu Gives Birth To Second Baby In B’Haram Captivity - report](#)”, 23 March 2021.

⁶ Funmilayo Idowu Agbaje, *The objectified female body and the Boko Haram insurgency in northeast Nigeria: Insights from IDP camps in Abuja*, African Security Review, 2020.

⁷ Joe Parkinson & Drew Hinshaw, “[Freedom for the World’s Most Famous Hostages Came at a Heavy Price](#)”, *Wall Street Journal*, 24 December 2017.

⁸ Jubilee Campaign, “[UNGA76 3rd Committee Side-Event: the Role of Criminal Groups with Regards to Slavery in Nigeria](#)” [video], *YouTube*, 1 November 2021.

⁹ Paul Carsten, Reade Levinson, David Lewis, & Libby George, *The Abortion Assault*, Reuters, 7 December 2022.

against economic, physical, psychological, and sexual violence, and expands the definition of rape to include all acts of non-consensual sexual penetration.¹⁰ Similarly, 34 states have ratified the 2003 Child Rights Act which prohibits child marriage and child domestic labor; the final 12 states to ratify the Act, however, are predominantly Muslim and had put up much resistance to the Act as Sharia law permits the marriage of girls who have experienced their first menstrual cycle, regardless of their age.¹¹

Pakistan

We are grateful for the Working Group's numerous communications to Pakistan regarding the unabated trend of abductions, forced faith conversions, and child marriages of Christian and Hindu girls.¹² Regrettably, recent statistics still indicate that somewhere between 1,000 and 2,000 Pakistani faith minority girls are kidnapped, forced to accept Islam, and marry adult Muslim men on an annual basis. Many of these cases, however, go unreported as (1) raising cases to the media is expensive and difficult; (2) state actors want to prevent stories of these egregious child rights violations from reaching mainstream media; and (3) advocacy on cases can endanger both the victims in captivity as well as their families who may face threats from the perpetrators.

Jubilee Campaign and one of our close advocacy partners, Voice for Justice, undertook to collate information¹³ on a sample of 100 cases [which have been made public and reported in media] which took place between October 2019 and October 2022. The majority of cases (42%) involving the abduction, forced religious conversion, and child marriage faith minority girls took place in 2021. The province of Punjab recorded the highest number of cases across all four years: 23 cases in 2019; 11 cases in 2020; 35 cases in 2021; and 17 cases in 2022. Regarding the girl victims' ages, the vast majority (61%) were under the age of 16 years, 18% were between the ages of 16 and 18 years, and 14% were over 18 years, and the ages of the remaining victims in seven cases were unreported.

Additionally, in our research we noted the following trends across the majority of cases:

- Although the majority of the girl victims of forced faith conversions and child marriage are minors, the fabricated age of all victims is deliberately altered to 18 years or above by perpetrators on certificates of marriage to avoid criminal conviction under the 1929 Child Marriage Restraint Act according to which marriage to underage children is illegal and punishable by imprisonment.
- Many religious institutions, local mosques, and seminaries routinely issue certificates of conversion; however, political parties and social welfare NGOs are also found to be involved in issuing these fraudulent certificates beyond the scope of any law or their mandates.
- The abduction of schoolgirls hinders their access to opportunities such as education, skill development, and employment, all of which are essential for leading a dignified and self-sufficient life.
- Many cases involving abduction, followed by child/forced marriage and forced conversions of minority girls are not reported to the police due to the stigma attached to the abduction followed by rape, and the alternative dispute resolution mechanism at community level wherein the

¹⁰ Premium Times, "[Gender-Based Violence: 34 states domesticate Nigeria's VAPP Act - Official!](#)", 6 November 2022.

¹¹ Steve Aya, "[FG: 34 States Have Domesticated Child's Right Act](#)", *This Day*, 29 November 2022. ; Honorable Justice Zaynab Bashir, Judge, National Industrial Court of Nigeria, [The Rights of a Child in Nigeria](#), International Association of Women Judges, 15 February 2023.

¹² United Nations, [AL PAK 6/2022](#), 26 October 2022. ; United Nations, [AL PAK 2/2016](#), 2 February 2016. ; United Nations, [AL PAK 1/2015](#), 22 June 2015.

¹³ Jubilee Campaign & Voice for Justice, [Conversion without Consent](#), 2022.

committee comprising community leaders engages both parties and convinces them to mutually settle the matter out of court.

- Minorities get frustrated from the investigation of cases, as the police (1) favor the influential Muslim parties over minorities, (2) use delaying tactics to avoid registering FIR against Muslims involved in abduction of minority girls for conversion, and (3) avoid applying all relevant sections in FIRs while they register complaints about commission of crimes. The police officers (4) do not investigate the complaints impartially and fairly. Instead, they (5) present the child marriages of minority girls as their love affairs with older Muslim men - many of whom already have wives and children - and (6) present certificates to the family of girl victims in order to discourage them from following-up the cases involving conversion of minority girls to Islam and their alleged marriage according to Muslim family laws.
- Many girl survivors face posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), including flashbacks, nightmares, severe anxiety, and uncontrollable thoughts. Depression and detachment have been found to be the most common long-term symptoms among the survivors.

There have been endless attempts taken by various senators and other government officials to insert into legislation provisions which criminalize abduction, forced conversions, and child marriages; regrettably, these efforts have proved largely fruitless. The 2016 Criminal Law (Protection of Minorities) Bill - outlawing forced conversions and religious conversions of individuals under the age of majority - passed the Assembly of Sindh Province but was quashed by a governor due to objections made by a religious-political party.¹⁴ In 2021, Muslim members of the Parliamentary Committee to Protect Minorities from Forced Conversions rejected a draft “Prohibition of Forced Conversions Bill” on grounds that it allegedly encroached upon Muslims’ rights to engage in Islamic evangelism and conversions of non-Muslims, as well as that it was allegedly in violation of Sharia principles which permit the marriage of girls who have experienced their first menstrual cycle, regardless of their ages.¹⁵ Similarly, in 2017 the Senate Standing Committee on the Interior declined to pass the Child Marriage Restraint (Amendment) Bill on accusations that it was “un-Islamic”.¹⁶

Do you have suggestions on potential areas of thematic focus for the Working Group’s future work?

We commend the Working Group’s requests for country visits to Nigeria and Pakistan, and we urge the Working Group to continue reaching out for dialogue and delegations. We also implore the Working Group to request a country visit to Egypt.

We recommend that the Working Group submit a communication to Egypt requesting information on (1) whether there are any investigative or inquiry efforts to gather reliable statistics on cases of abductions, conversions, and marriages of Coptic women and girls, and to collate information on patterns/trends that will assist with preemptive prevention of similar cases; (2) what measures are being taken, if any, to locate Coptic Christian girls and women who have been missing for prolonged periods of time and about whom there has been no case updates in years; (3) any plans on reinstating the 1863 “advisory session” procedures for intended converts.

We recommend that the Working Group submit a communication to Nigeria requesting information on (1) the status of Leah Sharibu; (2) what steps are being taken, if any, to increase security at educational institutions; (3) what prosecutorial measures are being exercised, if any, to apprehend and punish military

¹⁴ Hafeez Tunio, “Sindh governor refuses to ratify forced conversion bill”, *The Express Tribune*, 7 January 2017.

¹⁵ Nadir Gurmani, “Parliamentary panel rejects anti-forced conversion bill amid protest by minorities’ lawmakers”, *Dawn*, 13 October 2021.

¹⁶ Ikram Junaidi, “Senate body rejects amendment to child marriage act as ‘un-Islamic’”, *Dawn*, 12 October 2017.

actors involved in forced abortions and infanticide; (4) what progress is being made to rescue girls and children from militant captivity, provide rehabilitation resources such as medical care and therapy, and preemptively respond to threats of abductions.

We recommend that the Working Group submit a communication to Pakistan requesting information on (1) what efforts are being taken, if any, to introduce, ratify, and implement legislation that comprehensively and categorically prohibits forced child marriage; (2) what efforts are being made, if any, to introduce, ratify, and implement legislation to criminalize forced religious conversions; (3) whether there are any plans to better train police officers regarding how to properly and expeditiously file cases involving disappearance/abduction of girls; (4) whether there are intentions to ensure that faith conversions are regulated and testified by a competent court; (5) whether girl victims are provided security during trials against perpetrators, and provided guarantees that their testimonies will be free from coercion and threat; (6) what steps are being taken, if any, to ensure that certificates of religious conversion are issued only by authorized entities; and (7) what measures are being taken, if any, to ensure that documentation submitted to the court - national identification, birth certificates, school records, etc. - is comprehensively reviewed and verified so that false claims of willful faith conversion and majority age status are disproven.