



**Press release**

**Bill against forced conversions must be passed**

*Lahore, 22 March 2019.* After two minor Hindu girls in Ghotki were allegedly abducted and converted forcibly to Islam, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) has called on the Sindh Assembly to 'take swift, serious measures to resurrect and pass the bill criminalising forced conversions.'

HRCP has said that 'it is imperative this bill be passed and steps taken to implement it. At present, forced conversions are too easily – and too often – disguised as voluntary conversions, leaving minor girls especially vulnerable. The ugly reality of forced conversions is that they are not seen as a crime, much less as a problem that should concern 'mainstream' (Muslim) Pakistan. The two young girls reportedly abducted in Ghotki are a case in point: that their families were unable to lodge an FIR is shocking. This should be the first line of defence in all such cases.

'The state has a responsibility to all its citizens to protect their freedom of religion or belief. This implies serious introspection into why the 2016 bill against forced conversions was not ratified by the governor at the time, Justice Saeeduzzaman Siddiqui. No reasons were given, nor is it clear whether he returned the bill officially or left it pending. Equally, the Sindh government should not have given in to pressure from a minority of religious parties who had objected to the bill. The present Sindh Assembly is morally bound to revisit the bill and ensure it is passed without capitulating to the religious far right or to any individuals or parties that object to its contents or underlying spirit.'

**Dr Mehdi Hasan**

Chairperson