

# **A LIVING HELL:** **The disgrace of** **Pakistan's abusive** **forced conversions**



Join our campaign and help us to  
protect young women and girls  
from sexual abuse and exploitation

Centre for Legal Aid  
Assistance & Settlement  
[www.claas.org.uk](http://www.claas.org.uk)



# WHO WE ARE

CLAAS is a Christian charity that helps Christians and others who face religious persecution in Pakistan. With offices in London and Lahore, we work with vulnerable minority families living in poverty and in constant fear of their lives because of the religious discrimination they face on a daily basis.

# WHAT WE DO

A key concern is the forced conversion and marriage of an estimated 1,000 Christian and Hindu girls each year, many of them minors.

Abducted from their families and forced to marry Muslim men sometimes decades older, they face a life of slavery, abuse and even sex work. Yet Pakistan's authorities do nothing to stop it amid a cultural climate of religious zealotry and fear.

This booklet will share more about their plight and how you can support us as we work to end this horrific practice.



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# SOMETHING HAS GONE WRONG IN PAKISTAN...

When Muhammad Ali Jinnah founded Pakistan, he promised minorities that their religion, life and culture would be respected. "They will be in all respects, the citizens of Pakistan, without any distinction of caste and creed," he said. Sadly Jinnah's vision has been betrayed and Islamic radicalism is growing in Pakistan, making life harder for religious minorities.

**... as minority girls are being forcibly converted to islam**

Forced conversions and marriages have become entrenched in Pakistan as political leaders, the authorities and faith leaders turn a blind eye or actively endorse the practice. Former prime minister Imran Khan called forced conversion 'un-Islamic', but this did not stop both the government and Islamist ruling bodies from shunning attempts to outlaw it.

The practice is being fuelled by a sinister money-making web involving Islamic clerics who solemnise the



marriages, magistrates who legalise them, and a corrupt police force that either refuses to investigate or sabotages investigations, effectively colluding with the perpetrators and enabling paedophilia.

The whole system is stacked against the victims so that perpetrators are emboldened and able to act with impunity. Little wonder many parents are too afraid to send their daughters to school for fear they will be abducted, and others are leaving the country.

# FORCED CONVERSION: HOW IT WORKS

Victims are typically Christian and Hindu women and girls from Punjab and Sindh. They come from poor low caste families, are under-educated, and lack legal rights and socio-economic power.

- **Abduction:** Muslim men looking for young brides rally together friends and relatives to abduct a girl. Victims, sometimes as young as 12, are often raped and abused by their abductor. The young age of many victims shows a strong link between the practice and paedophilia.
- **Conversion:** After their abduction, girls are taken to religious institutions where they are quickly converted to Islam against their will by clerics who give no consideration to their consent or whether they were abducted. The authorities meanwhile do nothing to stop the conversion out of fear that apprehending the cleric may be construed as an attack on Islam.
- **Marriage:** Once converted, the girls are married to a stranger against their will – even though forced marriages are illegal, as is the marriage of girls aged under 16 (or 18 in Sindh province). Marriage laws are ignored on the pretext that



Islamic Sharia law views girls as capable of making decisions once they reach puberty.

When parents turn to local police for help, instead of investigating, they are handed conversion and marriage certificates, and told that their daughter has voluntarily converted to Islam and is now living with her new 'husband'. Even if the courts get involved, they often side with the perpetrators, leaving many of the girls condemned to a life of sexual abuse and rape by their husbands, with some being sold and trafficked into prostitution.

# S. YOUNIS'S STORY:

## Forced into prostitution and domestic slavery

S. Younis, 14, was terribly abused after being abducted, forcibly converted and married by her Muslim neighbour in 2019. He abducted her when she was on her way to the shops and threatened to kill her if she tried to escape or get help. She told the cleric carrying out the conversion and marriage ceremony that she was a Christian and did not want to marry this man but he ignored her pleas.

She was then taken to the family home where she was turned into a domestic slave with no breaks or rest and was physically abused by her abductor, even losing her unborn

baby due to the beatings. To make matters worse, her mother-in-law was involved in the sex trade and put her to work sleeping with men for money.

When she decided not to obey them anymore, they made her work as a domestic servant in another household. It turned out to be a blessing in disguise as the wife of her employer was a kind woman and when S. Younis confided in her about her plight, she helped her return to her family.

After a year-and-a-half of hell, S. Younis was free but the nightmare has continued as her abductor is now harassing her family. They have been forced into hiding amid ongoing death threats and fears that he will kidnap her again. The Edge Foundation is supporting them.



... she was physically abused by her abductor, even losing her unborn baby due to the beatings

# **NAILA'S STORY:**

## **She fled her captors, now she is in hiding**



Naila, from Sialkot, Punjab, was 14 when she was kidnapped as she met her Muslim friend. It was her friend who pushed her into a van where her older brother and his cousins were waiting. Naila was taken to his other sister's house in Machi Khokhar where a clerk came to convert Naila to Islam so she could be married to him. Despite threats, Naila refused and told them she would rather die than give up her religion.

Her chance to escape came when her captors decided to move her to Rawalpindi. While en route, she pretended to need the ladies' room and when they let her out of the van, she shouted for help.

Thankfully people came to her assistance and she was saved. But Naila and her family are now in hiding because of threats against them from her abductor's family. CLAAS is supporting Naila and it is hoped she will soon return to school.

**... Naila told them she would rather die than give up her religion**



... they shot  
her dead in  
the street

## SONIA'S STORY:

### Murdered because she refused to marry him

**24-year-old Sonia Allah Rakha was working as a housemaid in Islamabad to support her family when she was cruelly murdered for refusing the advances of a local Muslim man.**

When Sonia first rejected the marriage proposal – and his request that she convert to Islam – he sent his mother to her family home in a bid to persuade her to accept, but Sonia's mother said that a marriage between the two would not be possible due to their different religions.

In a third attempt, he and a friend confronted Sonia while she was on her way to work in Media Town. When she turned him down again, they shot her dead in the street on the morning of 30 November 2020 before fleeing the scene.

Following a police investigation, the two men have been charged with her murder – a crime punishable by death in Pakistan – but no sentence will ever bring back Sonia, a cherished daughter who had her whole life ahead of her.

# FARAH'S STORY:

## Taken when she was just 12

**Farah was just 12 when she was kidnapped in June 2020 by a 45-year-old man who forced her to convert to Islam and marry him.**

When her father, Asif Masih, pleaded with the police to help free Farah, they sided with the kidnapper and accused Asif of hiding his daughter. They also threatened to register a blasphemy case against him. Only four months later, after Asif lodged a writ in court, did the police file a First Information Report (FIR). Even then, it took protests by Faisalabad's Christian community

to finally force the police to produce Farah in the magistrate's court.

Speaking in court, Farah said she had married her abductor of her own free will. But having been with him for several months by this point, it is highly likely she was threatened before her court appearance. Incredibly, the court ignored the fact that Farah was visibly a child and allowed her to stay with her abductor.

By the grace of God, she has since been returned to her parents.







# NAYAB'S STORY:

## Sent home with her abductor

**In a similar case, 13-year-old Nayab was kidnapped in 2021 by the owner of the beauty salon where she worked. When her father, Shadid Masih Gill, went to the police, they refused to help him and instead arrested 16 family members and told him his daughter was living in a shelter home.**

Brought to court in May 2021, Nayab wore a face covering and was accompanied by her abductor and a group of men, women and police officers – a ‘heavy squad’ intended to intimidate the court into supporting the abductor.

Instead of upholding laws prohibiting the marriage and conversion of juveniles, the judge asked Nayab if anyone had pressured her into converting to Islam and marrying her abductor; and who she wanted to go home with. Nayab said her conversion and marriage were of her own free will and that she wanted to go home with her abductor.

Inconsolable at the loss of his daughter, Masih said: “I didn’t know that he was planning to take my daughter away from me. They brainwashed my daughter. She was a good Christian – I don’t know how she was trapped by them.”

# HELP US STOP THE FORCED CONVERSION OF YOUNG CHRISTIAN WOMEN AND GIRLS

Minority communities in Pakistan live in fear of their young women and girls being kidnapped and forced into marriages and conversions, with little being done by the government or authorities to enforce the laws designed to protect them.

CLAAS is calling on the international community, Christians and people of all faiths or none to help us hold the Pakistani government to account on its duty to uphold human rights for all.

Please support us in this work.

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## HOW YOU CAN HELP

- Pray for changes in the law to stop forced conversion. Visit [www.claas.org.uk/please-pray](http://www.claas.org.uk/please-pray)
- Host an event at your church: distribute leaflets, invite a CLAAS speaker, hold a discussion group. More at [www.claas.org.uk/involve-church](http://www.claas.org.uk/involve-church)
- Ask your MP to urge the UK to put pressure on the Pakistani government. Find out how at [www.parliament.uk/get-involved](http://www.parliament.uk/get-involved)
- Make a donation. Your gifts will support our campaign work and help us to provide legal aid, shelter and financial support to victims.

Donate at:  
[www.claas.org.uk/give-now](http://www.claas.org.uk/give-now)

# I would like to help.



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**YES. I would like to help CLAAS support and protect young women and girls in Pakistan.**

## Here is my contribution of:

£25     £50     £100    Other £ \_\_\_\_\_

I enclose a cheque (made payable to CLAAS)

I want to pay monthly, please send me more information

Or please debit my account (see below)

## Your details:

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## I prefer to give by credit card/debit card. Please debit my:

Visa     CAF Card     MasterCard

Card No. 

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Or you can make a donation online at:

[www.class.org.uk](http://www.class.org.uk)

Thank you.

Data Protection: CLAAS would like to keep you informed about its work in Pakistan. If you do not wish to hear from us then please tick the box here.

FOLD AND SEAL



“ More than 70 years after [Pakistan] gained its independence, one of the most heart-rending issues its religious minorities face is the abductions, forced conversions and forced marriages ... The continuous and steady increase in these cases has made this practice a national and international tragedy. Yet successive governments have failed to take any effective action to prevent this tragic and inhuman practice. ”

**Jim Shannon MP, UK, Chair,  
All-Party Parliamentary Group  
for Pakistani Minorities**



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