



## Oral Statement

Human Rights Council 45<sup>th</sup> session

Agenda Item 4 – Human rights situations that require the Council's attention

General Debate

25 September 2020

Delivered by Markus Stefan Hofer

Madam President,

This statement is on behalf of The World Evangelical Alliance, the World Council of Churches, and Christian Solidarity Worldwide.

Pakistani authorities have failed to bring justice in cases of abduction and forced marriages of underage girls belonging to religious minorities. Recently in Punjab, three girls under the age of 18 and belonging to Christian families, were abducted, forcibly converted to Islam, and married by force.

In these cases, Pakistani courts have ruled in favor of the abductor. Courts have ignored the parents' appeals for recovery of their children.

In Pakistan, the Child Marriage Restraint Act 2019 sets the age limit for marriage at 18. But courts are failing to determine the correct age of minor girls for the purpose of marriage. Courts have refused to consider birth certificates and official documents which confirm age and religion of the girls.

We call on the government of Pakistan to bring justice to these families, and to enforce legislation prohibiting child marriage with strict age verification mechanisms by the judiciary. And we call on Pakistan to enforce Article 20 of its Constitution which prohibits forced religious conversion.

Thank you.