

The government of Pakistan malign a rights body for “alleged anti-state propaganda”

Monday 12 September 2022, by [MUGHAL Aftab Alexander](#) (Date first published: 25 August 2022).

The government of Pakistan maligned the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ), a rights body, for “alleged anti-state propaganda,” for submitting a human rights report in July 2022 to the United Nations Human Rights Council for Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

A news item appeared in Daily Jang, a widely circulated Urdu language national newspaper, on 21 August 2022 that the CSJ’s report is not based on reality and against the interests of Pakistan. The interior ministry has ordered the Punjab provincial government to take action against the organisation.

However, Peter Jacob, a frontline human rights defender, denied government allegations and said that the report reflects the ground reality about freedom of religion and belief in Pakistan.

The CJP, based in Lahore, Punjab’s provincial capital, has submitted the report to the UN for 42 Session of UPR, which was endorsed by nine Pakistani human rights organisations, including the National Commission of Justice and Peace of Catholic Bishops Conference of Pakistan. The fourth review of Pakistan is due in January and February 2023 in Geneva, Switzerland.

The report discussed the issues of blasphemy laws, forced conversion, biased school curriculum, and delayed the formation of national commission for minorities, and made concrete and workable recommendations for the government.

Civil society organisations have categorically denied the government’s allegation. On 22 August, the Joint Action Committee for Peoples’ Rights (JACPR), Lahore, said in a statement that the issues covered in the report have been widely discussed, in the courts, parliamentary bodies and media in the country.

The government should constructively consider these recommendations to help resolve the longstanding issues, which are an actual source of embarrassment for the country. For UPR, the government is supposed to submit its report in October 2022, so the government can respond to the issues raised or even act to resolve the same and can seek credit during the session next year. However, if the incidence of violence in the name of religion continues, the government will be held answerable at all competent forums, the JACPR said.

“We also reiterate that vibrant participation of civil society organizations helps improve views about Pakistan and its engagement helps improve the conditions for its people. Whereas, living in a state of denial will impede the resolution of these long-standing issues,” said Irfan Mufti, Convener of JACPR, a coalition of 37 civil society organisation.

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P.S.

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