



# General Assembly

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## Human Rights Council

### Fifty-second session

27 February–31 March 2023

Agenda item 3

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,  
political, economic, social and cultural rights,  
including the right to development**

## **Written statement\* submitted by Stichting Global Human Rights Defence, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[4 February 2023]

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\* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



## Bonded Labour in Pakistan

Bonded Labour also known as debt slavery is a form of forced labour within which an individual “pledges to work either for money, a lender or a landlord to repay a debt of loan.”

(1) This personal service can be carried out by the debtor themselves or by someone under their care, acts as a security for the loan they received. These debtors are often tricked into agreeing to exorbitant interest rates and then trapped in the lender or landlord’s service due to unspecified or unlimited work durations to pay off the debt. This work is done for little or no pay at all (2)

As per the 2003 study ‘Child Labor in Agricultural Sector Hyderabad Sindh, Pakistan’ reports that 5.2 million children working in the agricultural bonded labour system in Pakistan. (3) One of the primary reasons attributed to the sustenance of such a system is the rampant poverty since it prevents children from sending their children to school. The control exercised over bonded labourers amounts to ‘ownership rights’ for the landlord. (4) The workers live in terrible conditions, inhale unsafe fumes from the black smoke during brick making process which causes asthma thereby increasing the risk of contracting tuberculosis.

Dalit women are used as debt slaves in brick kilns, agriculture and textile industries. (5) They are heavily involved in slavery which is caste based and also forced into prostitution and manual scavenging. (6)

The introduction of Sindh Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act 2015 was a step forward towards protection of bonded labourers in Pakistan. Even though the law prohibits practice of bonded labour, the government’s efforts to observe and report these cases need active evaluation. The State needs to provide economic assistance by increasing availability within the job market and working towards opening up more avenues for financial stability. Without the guarantee of their survivability and alternative routes to economic independence that reduce the need to take out loans, the chances of reverting to the same patterns is highly probable.

There is a dire need for social awareness, updating the laws to maintain relevance, political will for future legislation, consultation and advocacy to ensure that the under- privileged and oppressed get their rights through the legal framework. Prosecution of law employers who have been held workers in bonded labour needs to be done. More efforts are required to withdraw export licenses from companies which make products under conditions that do not conform to labor laws. More funding needs to be allocated to local NGOs to implement legislations.

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(1) UNICEF Office of Research- Innocenti, “The Glossary,” [www.unicef-irc.org](http://www.unicef-irc.org), accessed October 15, 2022,

[https://www.unicefirc.org/php/Thesaurus/Glossary\\_Display.php?GLOSS\\_ID=102&PoPuP=No](https://www.unicefirc.org/php/Thesaurus/Glossary_Display.php?GLOSS_ID=102&PoPuP=No).

(2) UNICEF Office of Research- Innocenti, “The Glossary.”

(3) Mahar and Mirjat, “Child Labor in Agricultural Sector Hyderabad Sindh, Pakistan.”

(4) Ayaz Qureshi, “Bonded Labour in Pakistan - Allegra,” Allegra, November 4, 2016,

<https://allegralaboratory.net/bonded-labour-in-pakistan/>

(5) IDSN, “Caste, Gender and Forced & Bonded Labour.”

(6) Ibid.