

Letter on the conditions of children in Pakistani prisons

7 December 1999

To the WSWs:

I refer to your reports of children sentenced to death in the United States. However, there are many other examples elsewhere. Pakistan is one of the main offenders in this matter.

There are over 50 children on death row in Pakistan, and though death sentences imposed on juveniles are usually commuted on appeal, Pakistan is one of the six countries in the world known to have executed juvenile offenders in the 1990s. There is a recent report on this matter published by the Human Rights Watch. The organisation, which has conducted a study on juvenile justice in Pakistan, has asked the Pakistan government to prohibit the death penalty for those under 18.

An earlier report by the organisation on violence against women, which was released in October, was dismissed by the Nawaz Sharif government as "baseless". Children accused of committing criminal offences were routinely tortured by police and they spent many months, even years, in overcrowded jails waiting for their trials to conclude.

The treatment of children in the Pakistani prisons violated local laws as well. While the law required the police to bring arrested children before a court within 24 hours, in practice, the police did so after several weeks. Children are routinely beaten up and are made to share cells with adults. There were 3,700 children in Pakistani jails by the end 1997 and nearly 90 percent were awaiting a decision on their trials. Children were made to sleep without beds and in very basic conditions. There are also reports of sexual abuse of children by guards and cellmates while there is no system of redressal. There are also no vocational and educational facilities in jails to cater to children.

The Human Rights Watch has made recommendations to the government to give children facilities according to the International Conventions on

Children. However, many religious groups have attacked the New York-based organisation as being a "Zionist-funded body" that pursues an "anti-Pakistan agenda". Independent lawyers, however, have confirmed the findings of the organisation.

Sincerely,

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Japan



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