



Protecting Pakistanis Imprisoned Abroad

HIGH-LEVEL CONSULTATION



INTERNATIONAL MIGRANTS DAY
DECEMBER 2024

On **18 December 1990**, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution on the **International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families**. Each year on 18 December, the United Nations uses **International Migrants Day** to highlight the contributions made by the roughly 281 million migrants and the challenges they face.

In commemoration of this, on 12 December 2024, the National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) and Justice Project Pakistan (JPP) organised a high-level consultation for key policy stakeholders. The event aimed to facilitate discussion of the challenges faced by Pakistani migrants and prisoners abroad through two thematic sessions focusing on prevention and protection. These discussions covered the need for safer migration practices and awareness, consular protection mechanisms, and repatriation of overseas Pakistani prisoners, framing strategic recommendations for systemic intervention.

The dialogue brought together key representatives from the Supreme Court of Pakistan, Ministry of Law and Justice, Ministry of Human Rights, Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Interior, members of the Parliament, National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs), diplomats, FIA, UN IOM and civil society actors.

Key outcomes of the discussion included unanimous consensus on the need to improve stakeholder and inter-ministerial coordination, commitment towards forming a working group on consular protection headed by the NCHR, and the need for a Consular Protection Act to formalise protections for overseas Pakistanis.

BACKGROUND

The Government of Pakistan has an obligation, under the 1973 Constitution and the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, to protect the fundamental rights of its citizens detained abroad. According to recent official estimates, over 23,000 Pakistani citizens are languishing in jails across the world, with the highest number in Saudi Arabia (10,432), UAE (5,292), India (706), Greece (598), Oman (578) and Malaysia (463).

Encouraged by the state, millions of Pakistanis emigrate abroad to seek better opportunities, particularly in the Gulf countries - the choice of over 90% of Pakistan's expat workforce. Pakistan is counted amongst the countries that rely heavily on foreign remittances for economic stability and foreign reserves. However, despite its dependence on foreign remittances from migrant workers, Pakistan must do more to protect these vulnerable citizens from landing in foreign prisons.

Pakistanis imprisoned abroad are at the mercy of local courts without access to adequate legal representation, impartial translators, or adequate consular assistance from Pakistani diplomatic missions. These destitute Pakistanis face the harshest punishments due to their lack of understanding of and assistance with the legal process, incapability to communicate directly with the court, and inability to produce evidence from Pakistan in their defence.

In the past, we have seen interministerial efforts across Federal Ministries to improve protections accorded to Pakistanis imprisoned abroad, including increased consular visits, revamped appointment procedures for Community Welfare Attaches, Prisoner Transfer Agreements with host countries and increased repatriations to Pakistan.

While these improvements are steps in the right direction, there is now an urgent need to reinvigorate these efforts and build sustained momentum towards comprehensive reform, including additional policy interventions, strengthened institutional mechanisms, and coordinated action across all relevant stakeholders to ensure effective protection of Pakistanis imprisoned abroad.

Against this backdrop, on 12 December 2024, in commemoration of International Migrants Day, the National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) and Justice Project Pakistan (JPP) organised a high-level consultation for key policy stakeholders, 'Protecting Pakistanis Imprisoned Abroad'. The event sought to examine the challenges faced by Pakistani migrants and prisoners abroad through two thematic sessions focusing on prevention and protection:

1. **Policy Dialogue I: Road to Safer Migration** focused on assessing current migration frameworks, including recruitment processes, worker protection mechanisms, and necessary policy reforms to prevent exploitation;
2. **Policy Dialogue II: Jailed Abroad and Repatriation** aimed to address challenges in consular assistance, legal representation, prisoner transfer agreements, and institutional coordination for effective repatriation.

This consultation's fundamental objective was to catalyse momentum towards developing a comprehensive implementation framework and secure a political commitment towards enhanced safeguards for Pakistani migrant workers and Pakistanis imprisoned abroad.

SPEAKERS



**Justice Syed
Mansoor Ali Shah**

Senior Puisne Judge,
Supreme Court of
Pakistan



**Allah Dino
Khowaja**

Federal Secretary for
Ministry of Human
Rights



**Rabiya
Javeri Agha**

Chairperson National
Commission for
Human Rights (NCHR)



**Saba
Sadiq**

Parliamentary
Secretary for Human
Rights



**Datuk Mariati
Robert**

Commissioner, Human
Rights Commission of
Malaysia (SUHAKAM)



**Senator Zeeshan
Khanzada**

Chairperson, Senate
Committee on Overseas
Pakistanis and Human
Resource Development



**H.E. Rongvudhi
Virabutr**

Ambassador, Kingdom
of Thailand to
Pakistan



**Barrister Aqeel
Malik**

Minister of State for
Law and Justice



**Naseer Khan
Kashani**

Managing Director,
Overseas Employment
Corporation



**Shazia
Marri**

Member, National
Assembly Standing
Committee on Foreign
Affairs and Business
Advisory Committee



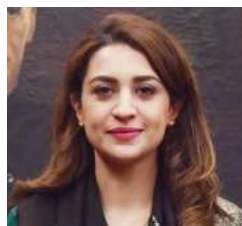
**M. Muqet Asim
Shah**

Director Overseas
Pakistanis, Ministry of
Foreign Affairs
Pakistan



**Senator Quratulain
Marri**

Member of the Senate
Functional Committee
on Human Rights



**Rida
Qazi**

Director General of
Parliamentary
Development Unit,
Senate of Pakistan



**Khaled Abdulaziz
Alshaer**

Vice-chairperson,
National Institution for
Human Rights,
Kingdom of Bahrain
NHRI



**Hala Ramzy
Fayez**

Member of the
National Institution of
Human Rights,
Kingdom of Bahrain
NHRI

SPEAKERS



**Mohammad Riaz
Fatyana**

Member of the
National Assembly
Standing Committee
on Human Rights



**Haseeb Shahbaz
Amin**

Community Welfare
Attache, High
Commission of
Pakistan, Malaysia



**Junaid
Akbar**

Member, National Assembly
Standing Committee on
Overseas Pakistanis and
Human Resource
Development



**Aisha
Chaudhary**

Former member of
Provincial Assembly of
Punjab



**Sahibzada
Sibghatullah**

Member, National Assembly
Standing Committee on
Overseas Pakistanis and
Human Resource
Development



**Fawad
Haider**

Head of Office,
International Centre
for Migration Policy
Development (ICMPD)



**Fatima
Bukhari**

Chief Executive
Officer, Musawi



**Shahbaz Akbar
Chaudhry**

Executive Director,
SPEAK Trust Pakistan



**Shehzad
Murtaza**

Chief Executive
Officer, Youth
Employability Network



**Suhail
Hussain**

National Programme
Officer Partnership
and Coordination, UN
International
Organization for
Migration (IOM)



**Zunaira
Inam**

Research Lead,
National Commission
for Human Rights



**Michelle
Shahid**

Team Lead Policy &
Advocacy, Justice
Project Pakistan



**Sarah
Belal**

Executive Director,
Justice Project
Pakistan

ATTENDEES

- **Mr. Justice Syed Mansoor Ali Shah**, Senior Puisne Judge, Supreme Court of Pakistan
- **Mr. Allah Dino Khowaja**, Federal Secretary for Ministry of Human Rights
- **Ms. Rabiya Javeri Agha**, Chairperson National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR)
- **Mrs. Saba Sadiq**, Parliamentary Secretary for Human Rights, Member of the National Assembly Standing Committee on Human Rights
- **Senator Quratulain Marri**, Chairperson, Senate Standing Committee on Planning Development and Special Initiatives, and Member of the Senate Functional Committee on Human Rights.
- **Senator Zeeshan Khanzada**, Chairperson, Committee on Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development
- **H.E. Mr. Rongvudhi Virabutr**, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Thailand to Pakistan
- **Barrister Aqeel Malik**, Minister of State for Law and Justice
- **Mr. Manzoor Masih**, Member Minorities, National Commission for Human Rights, Pakistan
- **Mr. Sahibzada Sibghatullah**, Member of the National Assembly Standing Committee on Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development
- **Mr. Mohammad Riaz Fatyana**, Member of the National Assembly Standing Committee on Human Rights
- **Mr. Muhammad Muqheet Asim Shah**, Director Overseas Pakistanis, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Pakistan
- **Mr. Junaid Akbar**, Member of the National Assembly Standing Committee on Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development
- **Ms. Shazia Marri**, Member of the National Assembly Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and Business Advisory Committee
- **Ms. Aisha Chaudhary**, former member of Provincial Assembly of Punjab
- **Ms. Rida Qazi**, Director General of Parliamentary Development Unit, Senate of Pakistan
- **Mr. Junaid Afzal**, Section Officer (ILO), Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development
- **Ms. Pakiza Saddique**, Public Relations Officer, Ministry of Human Rights
- **Ms. Tankeem Wazir**, Assistant Chief (Complaint Cell) Policy Planning Unit, Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development
- **Mr. Faisal Ali**, Deputy Chief Policy Planning Unit, Ministry of Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development
- **Mr. Ashfaq Sheikh**, Additional Director Welfare and Services Division, Overseas Pakistanis Foundation
- **Dr. Ghulam Nasir ul Haq**, Deputy Director Welfare, Overseas Pakistanis Foundation
- **Ms. Khadija Arshad**, Welfare Officer, Overseas Pakistanis Foundation
- **Mr. Naseer Khan Kashani**, Managing Director, Overseas Employment Corporation

ATTENDEES

- **Mr. Ahsan Butt**, Assistant Chief Planning, Ministry of Interior
- **Mr. Asim H. Qureshi**, Section Officer, Ministry of Interior
- **Mr. Manzoor Masih**, Member Minorities, National Commission for Human Rights, Pakistan
- **Mr. Qamar Zaman**, Deputy Director, Federal Investigation Agency
- **Mr. Tariq**, Federal Investigation Agency
- **Ms. Sonayna Azhar**, Vice Consul, British High Commission
- **Mr. Pornnarong Buddhavadhana**, First Secretary, Embassy of Thailand in Pakistan
- **Mr. Nobukuni Shinohara**, First Secretary, Embassy of Japan in Pakistan
- **Ms. Anna Emmanuel**, Communications Officer, Embassy of Germany in Pakistan
- **Ms. Datuk Mariati Robert**, Commissioner, Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM)
- **Ms. Aida Suraya Haron**, Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM)
- **Mr. Faiz Rahman**, Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM)
- **Dr. Haseeb Shahbaz Amin**, Community Welfare Attache, High Commission of Pakistan, Malaysia (online attendance)
- **Mr. Khaled Abdulaziz Alshaer**, Vice-chairperson, National Institution for Human Rights, Kingdom of Bahrain NHRI (online attendance)
- **Ms. Hala Ramzy Fayez**, Member of the National Institution of Human Rights, Kingdom of Bahrain NHRI (online attendance)
- **Mr. Sami**, Member of the National Institution of Human Rights, Kingdom of Bahrain NHRI (online attendance)
- **Mr. Fawad Haider**, Head of Office, International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD)
- **Mr. Umer Wazir**, Project Officer, International Centre for Migration Policy Development
- **Ms. Mahnoor Abbas**, Lawyer, Society for Human Rights and Prisoners' Aid
- **Mr. Suhail Hussain**, National Programme Officer Partnership and Coordination, UN International Organization for Migration (IOM)
- **Mr. Shehzad Murtaza**, Chief Executive Officer, Youth Employability Network
- **Mr. Muhammad Ehsan**, Director, Youth Employability Network
- **Mr. Shahbaz Akbar Chaudhry**, Executive Director, SPEAK Trust Pakistan
- **Mr. Taimoor Abid**, Programme Officer, SPEAK Trust Pakistan
- **Ms. Fatima Bukhari**, Chief Executive Officer, Musawi
- **Mr. Kamran Raja**, Chief Executive Officer, The Pakistan Times
- **Ms. Myra Imran**, Staff Reporter, The News International
- **Mr. Omar A. Ranjha**, Judicial Law Clerk to the Justice Syed Mansoor Ali Shah, Supreme Court of Pakistan

THE DISCUSSIONS



The high-level consultation brought together key stakeholders – parliamentarians, government representatives, diplomatic missions, National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs), civil society organisations (CSOs), international organisations, and legal experts – to discuss the critical challenges surrounding migration, accountability for smugglers, and the protection of Pakistani prisoners abroad. The discussion underscored the collective responsibility of the state to safeguard the dignity, rights, and welfare of its citizens, particularly the vulnerable migrants who face exploitation, isolation, and legal hardships abroad.

Sarah Belal, JPP's Executive Director, kicked off the event with a warm welcome, expressing gratitude to all attendees and highlighting the rare and valuable opportunity of having such influential stakeholders gathered together. Zunaira Inam from the NCHR followed with a compelling

compelling presentation on the challenges confronting Pakistani migrants, outlining the Commission's significant initiatives and interventions in this critical field.

A powerful documentary produced by the NCHR was then screened, vividly depicting the dangerous journeys undertaken by Pakistani migrants in search of better opportunities. The video highlighted the Messenia migrant boat tragedy through an interview with one of the 12 survivors - a Pakistani national whose journey to Italy ended catastrophically when the vessel capsized in Greek waters. He recounted how desperation had driven him to risk everything for the chance of providing better support for his family, and that he was lucky to survive when hundreds of his fellow passengers did not. The tragedy claimed the lives of over 500 irregular migrants, including 209 Pakistani nationals, and served as a sombre reminder of the goals of the ensuing policy dialogues.



POLICY DIALOGUE 1: ROAD TO SAFER MIGRATION





Senator Quratulain Marri delivered the opening remarks to the first policy dialogue, bringing a human perspective to the discussion by emphasising the plight of over 23,000 Pakistanis languishing in prisons abroad, particularly in Gulf countries. She described how these prisoners, often charged with minor infractions, face devastating consequences due to unfamiliar legal systems, lack of translators, and restricted access to legal aid. She urged immediate action on Prisoner Transfer Agreements (PTAs) and their implementation, stressing that the delay has profound consequences for families:

“Every day we delay, children grow up without their parents, spouses without their partners, and parents without their children. We must act now to ensure no Pakistani feels abandoned.”

Her remarks were met with broad agreement, with moderator Zunaira Inam then shifting the conversation to Naseer Kashani, Managing Director of the Overseas Employment Corporation (OEC). Kashani outlined critical issues within the migration governance system, particularly the role of Community Welfare Attaches (CWAs). He noted that CWAs, tasked with supporting migrant workers abroad, are under-resourced and undertrained:

“Capacity building of CWAs is critical. They are on the frontline of providing support but lack the tools and resources to meet the challenges migrants face.”



Mr. Kashani further highlighted the fragmented nature of migration-related data. Despite multiple portals, he argued, their siloed operation prevents the development of comprehensive, data-driven policies. He emphasised the need for integrated platforms and collaboration with stakeholders such as the ICMPD, ILO, and FIA to address gaps.

When asked by Sarah Belal about awareness campaigns on platforms like TikTok, Mr. Kashani agreed on the importance of outreach but pointed to the underlying economic desperation that drives irregular migration:

“We can raise awareness, but unless we create jobs and economic stability in Pakistan, people will continue to turn to smugglers out of desperation. Trust in institutions is low, and we need transparency to rebuild it. Ministries need to collaborate with each other.”



At this stage, MNA Shazia Marri posed critical questions about inter-ministerial collaboration, asking why coordination remained a challenge:

“You say the three ministries—Interior, Foreign Affairs, and OPHRD—need to collaborate. Are they not collaborating right now? And if so, why are we seeing such a massive spike in the number of overseas Pakistani prisoners?”



MNA Shazia Marri reiterated the need for strong legislative initiatives and invited the National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) to take the lead in identifying actionable reforms.

Responding to this, Muhammad Muqet Asim Shah, Director Overseas Pakistanis from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, asserted that while SOPs and focal points exist, irregular migration remains a complex issue. The absence of documentation in many cases hinders their ability to act effectively. He called for better inter-agency support to address undocumented cases swiftly.

The dialogue then shifted to Fawad Haider, Country Director of the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), who highlighted the critical role of Migrant Resource Centres (MRCs).

Fawad described how MRCs conduct pre-departure awareness sessions and utilise digital platforms, including TikTok, to educate communities about safe migration. However, he pointed out that awareness efforts need to go further:

“Awareness must extend beyond pre-departure. Post-arrival support—covering health, legal aid, and human rights protections—is equally critical.”



Drawing on statistics, CEO of SPEAK Trust, Shahbaz Chaudhry, underscored the shortcomings in Government outreach. He shared that only 7% of migrants received information through the Government, while most relied on private agencies or personal networks. He stressed the need for improved, comprehensive awareness strategies:

“We need to divide awareness into pre-departure, post-departure, and post-arrival stages, focusing on health, legal protections, and rights education. Social media must be central to this effort.”



FIA Deputy Director, Qamar Zaman, provided insights into irregular migration, identifying two critical aspects. The first involves migrants with genuine documents who later destroy them to avoid identification, while the second involves unregulated checkpoints facilitating irregular migration:

“We have strengthened monitoring at immigration checkpoints and are working with ICMPD to bolster oversight mechanisms. However, a coordinated approach across agencies is essential to curb irregular migration effectively.”

Senator Zeeshan Khanzada, Chairman of the Senate Standing Committee on Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource Development, shared a personal story that underscored the urgency of addressing overseas prisoner issues. Recalling a recent phone call from a prisoner in Oman, he stressed the need for immediate intervention:

“Our Committee cannot ignore these stories. A man told me he had 12 years left on his sentence, and his situation reflects the broader crisis facing Pakistani prisoners abroad.”

Senator Zeeshan Khanzada pointed to sub-agents as a major complicating factor, noting that while they have no formal role under the Emigration Ordinance, they operate unchecked and often exploit migrant workers. He stressed the support of his Senate Committee towards tackling these issues:

“We need tighter regulation of Overseas Employment Promoters (OEPs) and stronger oversight to eliminate these illegal sub-agents.”



Mr. Faisal Baloch, from the MOPHRD’s policy planning unit, spoke about action being taken by the Federal Government for closer collaboration and cross-departmental coordination, citing the Cabinet Committee on Emigration, Overseas Employment and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET). This Committee was formed in 2024 by the Prime Minister of Pakistan and involved the PM, the Ministers of: Overseas Pakistanis and Human Resource

Development; Foreign Affairs; Interior; National Health Services, Regulation & Coordination; Industries & Production; and Commerce.

Aisha Chaudhry, a former Member of the Punjab Assembly, said that this Committee should also aim to protect the rights and interests of detained Pakistani nationals overseas. MNA Shazia Marri reiterated the need for strong legislative initiatives and invited the National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) to take the lead in identifying actionable reforms.

Fawad Haider from ICMPD said that an extremely important step was to pass the National Emigration and Welfare Policy, which has been in the works for many years now. This policy would enable a multi-stakeholder, whole-of-government approach to all issues relating to migration. This sentiment was echoed by the representative from the UN International Organisation for Migration (IOM), Suhail Hussain.



POLICY DIALOGUE 2: JAILED ABROAD AND REPATRIATION



This session was opened by Ms. Rabiya Javeri Agha, Chairperson of the National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR). She spoke about the NCHR's key role, ranging from interventions to secure the return of 199 Indian fishermen in Pakistani jails to their home country, to close collaboration with Malaysia's Human Rights Commission, SUHAKAM, to protect Pakistanis imprisoned in Malaysia:



“Behind the billions of dollars migrants send back are real human lives who suffer and toil without protections. It is the State’s responsibility to look after them, and we must act now.”

Ms. Agha highlighted the importance of better data collection and transparency, which are crucial for guiding policy reform on this issue.

KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY

HON’BLE JUSTICE SYED MANSOOR ALI SHAH



Hon’ble Justice Mansoor Ali Shah, Senior Puisne Judge of the Supreme Court of Pakistan, delivered a powerful and impassioned keynote address, reframing the issue of consular access as a fundamental human rights imperative, and setting the tone for the ensuing dialogue. Drawing on legal precedents and constitutional principles, Justice Shah argued that consular protection must transcend its traditional framing as a diplomatic function. Instead, it must be recognised as an extension of the state’s duty to protect its citizens:

“Migration is not about numbers; it is about dignity. Consular access guarantees the right to life, dignity, and fair trial. To deny it is to strip migrants of their humanity. This right extends beyond national borders—it is an embodiment of the state’s duty to uphold the fundamental rights of its citizens wherever they may be.”

“It is unfortunate that we still lack a Consular Protection Policy, despite clear judicial directives. This delay not only undermines our Constitutional obligations but erodes the trust of citizens in their state.”

Hon’ble Justice Syed Mansoor Ali Shah called for the following urgent reforms:

- Recognising consular access as a constitutional right enshrined under Article 4, which guarantees the inalienable right to life and dignity.
- Intensive training for consular officers in international human rights law, domestic legal systems, and cultural sensitivity.
- Public dissemination of data on overseas Pakistanis to enable transparency and accountability.
- Establishing monitoring and oversight mechanisms to ensure consular offices fulfil their obligations effectively.
- Developing a clear repatriation policy to bring Pakistani prisoners home and support their reintegration.

Quoting Pope Francis, Justice Shah concluded:

“Migrants are an expression of hope, hope for a better future. We must live up to that hope, because to ignore it would be to abandon our humanity.”

Michelle Shahid, Team Lead Policy and Advocacy at Justice Project Pakistan, opened the session by posing two thought-provoking questions to stimulate the general discussion:

1. With over 23,000 Pakistanis imprisoned globally, many lack adequate legal representation or consular support. Considering this, what measures and actionable strategies can be taken to strengthen consular protection (both, short

and long term) and ensure compliance with Pakistan’s obligations under the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations?

2. Pakistan has signed Prisoner Transfer Agreements (PTAs) with 11 countries, yet implementation remains limited. What steps can be taken to fully operationalise these agreements, particularly with countries like Saudi Arabia and the UAE, where the majority of Pakistani prisoners are held?

Mr. Allah Dino Khawaja, Federal Secretary for Human Rights, stressed the importance of transparency and better utilisation of existing mechanisms, particularly regarding Prisoner Transfer Agreements (PTAs):

“We need to publicise all existing PTAs. Without this transparency, families cannot lobby for the rights of their loved ones. A clear mechanism is critical for effective repatriation.”



Saba Sadiq, MNA and Parliamentary Secretary for Human Rights, spoke about the importance of cross-party collaboration. She pledged her support for reforms and urged immediate steps to mitigate the suffering of prisoners and their families:

“If we cannot bring prisoners home, we must at least facilitate family visits to ensure these individuals do not feel abandoned.”

The need for a comprehensive legal framework became increasingly evident throughout the discussion. Barrister Aqeel Malik brought his experience as a legal practitioner to the table, emphasising the importance of implementing and reviewing PTAs. He urged the passage of legislation to formalise protections for Pakistani nationals abroad, suggesting a Consular Protection Act be passed that encompasses a wide range of safeguards upholding the rights of imprisoned Pakistani nationals.



Asim Qureshi, Section Officer at the Ministry of Interior, spoke about the work being done by his division to ensure implementation of Prisoner Transfer Agreements, citing the recent example of 56 Pakistanis being repatriated from Sri Lanka in October 2024. He spoke about ongoing efforts to repatriate prisoners from Iran, and said that a PTA with Malaysia was pending their signature, asking the representatives of SUHAKAM present to lobby at home for the finalisation of this agreement.

Mr. Allah Dino Khawaja stated that if MOI gives MOHR the existing PTAs, they will publish them on their website. Chairperson Rabiya Javeri Agha said that MOI should get in touch with local NHRIs to facilitate any repatriations.

Datuk Mariati Robert, Commissioner of the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (SUHAKAM), ended the session by speaking about the integral need for collaboration between NHRIs on this issue, and said that SUHAKAM and the NCHR had enjoyed a close working relationship in their efforts to visit and protect the 463 Pakistani nationals imprisoned in Malaysia. She said that the draft Prisoner Transfer Agreement between Pakistan and Malaysia was close to being finalised and signed, and that this was an important step in the right direction that should be mirrored with other governments.





Pakistan's National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) with SUHAKAM - Human Rights Commission of Malaysia

RECOMMENDATIONS

1 CONSULAR PROTECTION ACT

Pass a Consular Protection Act to formalise legal protections and consular support for Pakistanis abroad.

2 PRISONER TRANSFER AGREEMENTS

Publicise and implement existing Prisoner Transfer Agreements to ensure transparency and enable prisoners and their families to seek repatriation.

3 IMPLEMENT NATIONAL EMIGRATION AND WELFARE POLICY

Pass and implement the National Emigration and Welfare Policy to enhance inter-ministerial and inter-departmental coordination to streamline protections and support for migrants and overseas prisoners.

4 AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS

Expand awareness campaigns pre-departure and post-arrival, with a focus on health, legal aid, labour and human rights protections.

5 LEGAL AID FUND

Establish a legal aid fund to provide representation to Pakistanis facing criminal charges abroad and ensure fair trial guarantees.

RESOURCES



[National Commission for Human Rights, *Perilous Journeys: Unravelling Irregular Migration from Pakistan* \(May, 2024\).](#)



[Justice Project Pakistan, *Migration, Remittances and Imprisonment: Migrant Workers and the Plight of Pakistanis in Saudi Arabia's Prisons* \(December, 2024\).](#)



[Justice Project Pakistan, *Through the Cracks: The Exploitation of Pakistani Migrant Workers in the Gulf Recruitment Regime* \(April, 2019\).](#)



[Justice Project Pakistan \(2024\). *Pakistanis Imprisoned Abroad* Interactive Webpage](#)



[Justice Project Pakistan, *Consular Protection Policy: Protecting the Rights of Pakistanis Imprisoned Abroad* \(December, 2024\).](#)



[Justice Project Pakistan, *Caught in a Web: Treatment of Pakistanis in the Saudi Criminal Justice System* \(March, 2018\).](#)



The National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) holds an "A" status accreditation from the Global Alliance of Human Rights Commission (GANHRI), recognizing its full compliance with the UN Paris Principles and its independence as Pakistan's premier human rights institution. With a comprehensive mandate to promote and protect human rights, NCHR has established itself as a leading voice in prison reform and prisoners' rights.

NCHR's work encompasses providing pro bono legal aid to prisoners, conducting systematic prison monitoring, investigating human rights violations, and advising the government on legislative and policy reforms in line with Pakistan's constitutional and international obligations. Through these efforts, NCHR has secured the release of over 100 juvenile prisoners, implemented substantial jail reforms following its investigative reports, and contributed significantly to international human rights mechanisms including the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and various UN treaty bodies.



Justice Project Pakistan (JPP) is a legal action non-profit organization based in Lahore, Pakistan that represents vulnerable Pakistani prisoners facing the harshest punishments at home and abroad, including those with psychosocial disabilities, victims of police torture, and overseas Pakistani prisoners.

The key to JPP's success is its methodology, which combines investigation, strategic litigation and policy advocacy. For over 14 years, JPP has defended Pakistani prisoners at home and abroad, successfully advocating for their rights and providing policy advice to parliamentarians and government officials on necessary systemic reform.

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