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## Pakistan's Sanitation Workers Face Systemic Discrimination, Amnesty Reports

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A new Amnesty International report reveals systemic caste and religious discrimination faced by Pakistan's sanitation workers, urging stronger legal protections.

A recent Amnesty International report, titled *Cut Us Open and See That We Bleed Like Them: Discrimination and Stigmatization of Sanitation Workers in Pakistan*, exposes the dire conditions faced by sanitation workers, predominantly non-Muslims, across six districts: Lahore, Bahawalpur, Karachi, Umerkot, Islamabad, and Peshawar. Conducted with the Centre for Law and Justice (CLJ), the study, published on July 29, 2025, documents widespread caste- and religion-based discrimination, hazardous working conditions, and inadequate legal protections, as reported by Dawn.com.

The report, based on interviews with over 230 workers, including 66 questionnaire respondents, highlights how sanitation work, traditionally a caste-designated occupation, is disproportionately assigned to religious minorities, particularly Christians and Hindus from so-called “lower castes.” Approximately 80% of sanitation workers are non-Muslims, despite comprising only 2% of Pakistan’s population, per the National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) 2022 findings. Workers face derogatory slurs like “chuhra” and “issai,” with 44% reporting stigmatization in public spaces, including segregation in dining areas, according to Amnesty’s findings. Women workers face “triple discrimination” due to religion, caste, and gender, with half reporting workplace harassment.

Amnesty notes that discriminatory job advertisements, analyzed from 2010 to March 2025, explicitly favor non-Muslims for sanitation roles, reinforcing systemic exclusion. Workers earn below the minimum wage, lack personal protective equipment, and face health risks from manual sewer cleaning, with 84 deaths reported in the past five years, per Sweepers Are Superheroes. The absence of anti-discrimination laws, coupled with fragmented labor laws since the 2010 devolution, leaves workers vulnerable, violating Pakistan’s obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and International Labour Organization (ILO) conventions.

Isabelle Lassée, Amnesty’s Deputy Regional Director for South Asia, stated that Pakistan’s failure to recognize caste-based discrimination as a human rights violation perpetuates marginalization. The report urges amending the Constitution to include caste protections, ending discriminatory hiring, and modernizing sanitation infrastructure to eliminate manual cleaning. These measures aim to ensure dignity and safety for workers, addressing a critical human rights issue in Pakistan.