

NA panel approves child protection, juvenile justice bills

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ISLAMABAD: The National Assembly's rights panel has passed two bills — Islamabad Capital Territory Child Protection Bill, 2017 and Juvenile Justice System Bill, 2017 — to stop violence against underage children and provide them legal protection.

The meeting of the Standing Committee on Human Rights was held on Tuesday under the chairmanship of MNA Babar Nawaz Khan in parliament.

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/1450403/na-panel-approves-child-protection-juvenile-justice-bills/>

Both the bills were under consideration for over a year and will be implemented in the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) as other provinces already have their laws for child protection and justice under international obligations to which Pakistan is a signatory.

Pakistan ratified UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990 to implement its provisions in letter and spirit and submit its periodic report to the UN in Geneva every five years.

Both the government bills were tabled in the National Assembly and then referred to the committee in May this year.

The ICT Child Protection Bill, 2017 has been drafted in consultation with relevant stakeholders. The bill comprehensively provides protection and care of all children, including unattended orphans. The salient features of the aforesaid bill include formation of child protection board, establishment of such institutions and granting licences to alternative child care centres.

The bill also proposes to establish a welfare fund for the children and for registration of the unattended children.

As per the bill, whenever a child protection officer receives a report that a child is in need of protection and care, he should carry out an initial assessment as prescribed to determine whether the child really requires care. After the initial assessment, there should be another comprehensive one involving the child's family environment, legal guardian, etc within 30 days. Later a child care plan will be developed, including emergency alternative care.

The chairperson of the committee also asked the Ministry of Human Rights Director-General Hassan Mangi about the punishment

mentioned in the bill for culprits. “There are separate sections in the Constitution of Pakistan. Specifically Section 228 deals with such offences, but this bill is more about child rescue and protection,” he replied.

Juvenile Justice System Bill

The Juvenile Justice System Bill 2017 steers to empower the state to make special provisions for the legal protection of children. Besides, the bill also aims to modify and amend the laws relating to criminal justice system for juveniles by providing special focus on disposal of cases through diversion and social integration of the juvenile offenders or a child who is alleged to have committed or who has been found to have committed an offence.

Similarly, the bill aims for social inclusion of the alleged offenders and their rehabilitation through processes provided and institutions and bodies established.

Later, Haripur District Police Officer Shahzad Nadeem Bukhari informed the committee about the update on a journalist (bureau chief) of a local newspaper in his area who was shot dead in June.

He said the journalist had tendencies to claim to have information about people and used to tell them that their names and issues would be published. “Besides, the reporter was also involved in rivalry of local groups and we are going through the personal computer of the journalist and all other accounts he had on social media, including local connections,” he concluded.