



FOR THE WELFARE OF







NEWSLETTER

Oct - Dec 2023 17th Edition



Supporting Sindh's Criminal Justice System through

Legal Aid, Legal Empowerment and Swift Trials.



Vakalatnamas filed in the Courts between Oct - Dec 2023



Bail applications granted between Oct - Dec 2023



Cases disposed off through court orders between Oct – Dec 2023



Acquittals (On merit & 265-K & 249-A C.rPC) between Oct - Dec 2023

Committee for the Welfare of Prisoners Established in 2004.





Committee for the Welfare of Prisoners began as a pilot project in the Women's Prison in Karachi under the leadership and supervision of Justice Nasir Aslam Zahid and his wife Dr. Farhat Zahid. Their efforts were recognized by the Government of Sindh in 2004 when the Committee was notified by the Home Department to provide free legal representation to under trial women and juvenile prisoners across Sindh. The Committee has been provided statutory footing under Section 55 of the Sindh Prisons and Corrections Service Act and Rules 2019.

The key areas of work are: Litigation, Legal Empowerment, Welfare and Research and Policy Advocacy.

LITIGATION

Beginning:

Our litigation services began in the Women's Prison in Karachi in 2004.

One of the first lawyers to join was Advocate Noor-ul-Saba who continues to lead the work in the women's prison after 18 years.

She has secured the acquittal of 250 women prisoners.

Expansion:

Seeing the success of the Committee's model the Government of Sindh expanded its mandate to provide legal aid to adult male under trial prisoners implicated in petty offences in 2011.

The model entails specialized teams of lawyers dedicated to specific prisons who visit the facilities at least twice a week to meet with potential clients.

With an expanded mandate, the committee began its operations in 5 Central Prisons, 10 District Prisons and other prisons and 8 Juvenile and Women Prisons.









Achievements:

The Committee's legal aid services are institutionalized and continue to decongest prisons through fast tracking of cases in petty criminal matters.

Some of our successes are:

Free Legal Aid has been provided to under trial prisoners in over 29,175 cases since 2004.

Out of these cases judicial verdicts have been obtained in 25,030

14,923 legal aid and awareness clinics/ prison visits have been conducted by our team of lawyers between 2012 and 2023.

10,743 applications for bail have been granted between 2011 and 2023.

Research and Policy

Sindh Prisons and Corrections Services Act & Rule - contribution towards drafting (2019). Paralegal Training Manual (2021)





Anniversary

LEGAL EMPOWERMENT

Beginning:

Prison paralegal classes first began in 2017 in Central Prison and Women Prison Karachi.

Expansion:

The program was later scaled to Central Prison Hyderabad and Sukkur.

Achievements:

Convicts trained:



Central Prison Hyderabad: **69**

entral Prison Wo Sukkur: **69**

Awareness provided to:



Hyderabad: 112

Central Prison Sukkur: **828** Women Prison Karachi: 235

Welfare

Beginning:

Sewing classes began in Women Prison Karachi in 2004.

Early Learning Center established in **Women Prison Karachi** in **2015.**

Sports room in juvenile detention facility in **Hyderabad** established in **2015**.

Mental health counselling in collaboration with Sehat Kahani in Women Prison Karachi in 2017.

Computer lab setup in juvenile detention in Hyderabad in **2017.**

Football training camps in

collaboration with Karachi United Football Club for juveniles began in **2017 in Central Prison Karachi**

Gymnasium setup in Women Prison Karachi in 2018.

Feminine hygiene partnership with Santex (Butterfly) Pakistan in **2021**.

Expansion:

Sewing center established in Women Prison Hyderabad in 2018

Early Learning Center Hyderabad inaugurated in **2017**.

One-of-a-kind sensory garden established in ELC Karachi in collaboration with the AMI School in **2021**.

Achievements:

120 women inmates provided counselling session and psychiatric evaluation assessments.

542 juveniles enrolled in football trainings camps since its inception.

















Chairperson's Message on 20th Anniversary:

As we stand at the crossroads of time, marking the 20 years of the Committee for the Welfare of Prisoners, I am honored to reflect on the remarkable journey that began in 2004 as a pilot project in the Women's Prison Karachi. Our vision was clear from the outset – to extend legal representation to first-time petty offenders who couldn't afford private legal representation.

Our journey, which commenced as a modest endeavor in the heart of Women's Prison Karachi, has gracefully evolved into a tapestry that now spans 20 prisons in Sindh. With a dedicated team of 31 lawyers, our mission transcends the mere provision of legal aid; we seek to redefine perceptions of prisoners – not as mere



JUSTICE NASIR ASLAM ZAHID
Chairperson

transgressors but as individuals yearning for a second chance at rehabilitation and a brighter tomorrow.

Our primary goal has been to alleviate the congestion in Sindh's prisons by providing free legal assistance to under-trial prisoners implicated in petty offenses. Over the course of our two decades of service, we've achieved significant milestones, including representing 29,175 under-trial prisoners in courts, disposing of 25,030 cases through court orders, obtaining bail for 10,743 individuals, and securing 11,038 acquittals.

In 2019, we bore witness to the winds of change as the province of Sindh led the charge in reforming colonial-era laws governing the prison system in Pakistan. It repealed the Prisons Act of 1984, replacing it with the progressive Sindh Prisons and Corrections Service Act and Rules 2019. This marked a paradigm shift towards corrections and rehabilitation within the prison system. Within this transformative landscape, the Committee for the Welfare of Prisoners found its statutory footing under section 55 of the Sindh Prisons and Corrections Service Act and Rules 2019.

Our commitment to the cause extends beyond legal assistance; we have engaged in research-based policy advocacy and rehabilitation interventions for prisoners in Sindh. Reflecting on the past years, we express our heartfelt gratitude to the Home Department, Government of Sindh, and the Prison Department. Their unwavering commitment and collaboration have been the cornerstone of our success. To our dedicated team, partners, and supporters, I extend profound gratitude for your wholehearted contributions to the Committee's success.

As we commemorate two decades of devoted service, I urge everyone to contemplate the brevity of life. Each evening, before concluding your day, consider the positive impact you can make tomorrow; it's our duty as a nation. Let us reaffirm our commitment to persistently strive towards our vision of extending legal support to those in need, offering a renewed opportunity for individuals entangled in the criminal justice system to forge a path toward a better life.

Committee Collaborates with Sindh Prisons and Corrections Service for a Capacity-Building Workshop for Sindh Prisons Staff

n a significant collaboration aimed at enhancing the skills of Sindh Prisons' key personnel, the Committee partnered with Sindh Prison & Corrections Service to organize a two-day capacity-building workshop at the Sindh Prisons Staff Training Institute in Hyderabad on the 18th and 19th December 2023.

The first day of the workshop was dedicated to enhancing administrative, operational, financial, and technical skills crucial for the effective functioning of Sindh Prisons. Participating, Superintendents, were equipped with practical tools to excel in their daily roles. Specific attention was given to understanding the role of the Oversight Committee, its mandate, formation, and an introduction to new sections, reporting, and inspection formats.





The second day provided a comprehensive overview of the Committee for the Welfare of Prisoners. Participants gained insights into the Committee's mandate, key streams, and remarkable achievements over the past two decades. The day served as an opportunity to underscore the collaborative commitment to continuous improvement within the Sindh Prisons system.

The Committee was privileged to host Honorable Home and Prison Minister Sindh, Brigadier (R) Haris Nawaz and Inspector General Sindh Prisons Syed Munawwar Ali Shah, who not only added their valuable insights to the discussions but also highlighted the significance of such collaborative initiatives in shaping the future of the Sindh Prisons.

The Committee expresses deep gratitude to Mr. Aslam Malik, Principal of Sindh Prisons Staff Training Institute, and Mr. Asif Ali Lakho, Vice Principal of Sindh Prisons Staff Training Institute, for their gracious accommodation and support in hosting this transformative workshop.

The collaborative workshop represents a vital step toward empowering excellence within the Sindh Prisons. By providing practical tools and a comprehensive understanding of key institutional roles, the Committee and Sindh Prison & Corrections Service aims to foster a culture of continuous improvement and commitment to the highest standards of service.

Committee Meets with Mr. Muhammad Iqbal Memon Additional Chief Secretary Government of Sindh

B arrister Haya Emaan Zahid, Secretary of the Committee, engaged in a productive meeting with Mr. Muhammad Iqbal Memon, Additional Chief Secretary Government of Sindh.

The discussion revolved around a comprehensive briefing on the Committee's interventions and the remarkable progress achieved thus far. This meeting served as a platform to showcase the tangible impact of our collective efforts.

The meeting underscored the pivotal role that key stakeholders, such as the Government of Sindh, play in supporting and advancing the Committee's objectives. The importance of collaborative efforts cannot be overstated, It is through the unwavering support of the Government of Sindh that we can truly make a difference in the lives of those impacted by incarceration.



From Barracks to Careers: A Paradigm Shift through Google Certificates:

as a trailblazer in the reform of colonial-era laws governing the prison system in Pakistan. Striding ahead of its counterparts, Sindh repealed the Prisons Act of 1984 and ushered in a new era with the introduction of the Sindh Prisons and Corrections Service Act and Rules 2019. The focal point of the new rules is a marked shift towards corrections and rehabilitation within the prison system.



Under the umbrella of these progressive reforms, the Committee in partnership with **Tech Valley Pakistan**, has initiated a transformative project aimed at empowering women prisoners. For the first time in history, Google Certificates have been made available to women incarcerated in the Women's Prison Karachi, as well as female prison staff.



Rather than being mere facilities of confinement, prisons are increasingly viewed as institutions with the potential to mold individuals into productive members of society. The partnership with **Tech Valley Pakistan** signifies a strategic step towards equipping women prisoners with tangible skills, thereby enhancing their prospects of employability upon release. This initiative recognizes the pivotal role skill development plays in the rehabilitation process. The Google Certificates program not only imparts valuable skills but also represents a tangible effort to break the cycle of recidivism. By offering a pathway to meaningful employment, the initiative aspires to transform women prisoners into contributing members of society.

The Committee, in collaboration with Women Aid Trust, recently hosted a ceremony in the Women's Prison Karachi to honor women prisoners and prison staff who successfully completed their first course under the Google Certificates program. The ceremony was attended by DIG Women's Prison & YOIS Sheeba Shah and Superintendent YOIS Humaira Quayoom. DIG Sheeba Shah emphasized the importance of collaborative efforts, she highlighted that true reform within the prison system necessitates the combined commitment of various stakeholders, including governmental bodies, non-profit organizations, and the private sector. She highlighted that this initiative, with its focus on skill development, not only empowers women prisoners but also demonstrates what can be achieved when different entities come together for a common cause. A similar ceremony was organized for the staff in the Women's Prison Hyderabad. Out of the ten, seven have successfully completed the first course.

Sindh's proactive approach to prison reform to address the immediate concerns of the prison population and contribute significantly to the broader goal of societal betterment serves as an example for other provinces. It is hoped that the momentum generated by these reforms will inspire a nationwide shift towards a more rehabilitative approach within the criminal justice system. The partnership between the Committee and **Tech Valley Pakistan**, with its focus on skill development, exemplifies the potential for positive transformation within the prison walls. It is a testament to the belief that even within the confines of incarceration, individuals can be nurtured to become assets to society, offering them a chance at redemption and a more promising future





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Bridging Borders with Compassion: Successful Repatriation of Indian Fishermen from District Prison Malir Karachi

hrough collective advocacy efforts with the National Commssion for Human Rights (NCHR), a total of 80 Indian fishermen, who had been languishing in District Prison Malir Karachi, were successfully repatriated after a prolonged period of anticipation on Novemeber 9th, 2023.



Embracing the humanitarian nature of this effort, our team worked tirelessly to provide the returning fishermen with essential items, acknowledging the challenges they faced during their time of detention.

The successful repatriation stands as a testament to the spirit of compassion that transcends borders. Bilateral exchanges of this nature contribute significantly to building bridges of understanding and goodwill. Beyond the immediate impact, they lay the foundation for lasting diplomatic relationships grounded in empathy and mutual respect. As this batch of Indian fishermen returns home, there is a hopeful anticipation for reciprocal gestures.



Committee Joins Forces with GoRead PK to Launch "Chunri Readers Program" in Women's Prison Karachi

he Committee is proud to formalize its collaboration with **coread.pk** GoRead PK to make a positive



impact on the lives of children incarcerated with their mothers.

In this exciting collaboration, GoRead's "Chunri Readers Program," is set to commence within the Women's Prison Karachi. The aim is to bring the world of stories and the joy of reading to children facing unique circumstances. Our collective goal is to go beyond the confines of the prison walls, creating an environment where the transformative power of stories can shape young hearts and minds.



Breaking Barriers: Committee Initiates Group Art Therapy for Women Prisoners in Karachi

he impact of imprisonment on mental health is profound, and the need for attention to this issue, particularly among women inmates in Pakistan, cannot be overstated. Despite constituting only 1.5% of the prison population in Sindh, research has uncovered a disproportionate burden of mental health challenges and socio-economic struggles among women prisoners, exacerbated by inadequate healthcare and a lack of structured mental health support within the prison system.

With the support of a small-scale research grant from Interactive Research and Development (IRD) Pakistan, the Committee has embarked on a transformative journey to pioneer a unique approach to mental health improvement-group art therapy. This





innovative method aims to provide women prisoners with a platform to express and manage complex emotions, such as anger and depression.

The study seeks to assess the efficacy of group art therapy in reducing depressive symptoms, enhancing mental well-being, and improving the overall quality of life for women prisoners. As a part of the study, all consenting women prisoners in the Women's Prison Karachi were screened for mental health needs; all women who showed symptoms of depression as a result of the screening were invited to be a part of group art therapy sessions supervised by a pyschologist conducted fortnightly.

In the first phase of our study, the Committee screened all 153 women prisoners in the Women's Prison Karachi for mental health needs. The comprehensive pre-screening process involved 113 willing participants, with 83 women identified as exhibiting symptoms of depression. A total of 40 women consented to partake in group art therapy sessions.

On December 11, 2023, the first group art therapy session commenced in the Women's Prison Karachi. Meticulously planned based on the analysis of results and participant demographics, these sessions aim to reduce depressive symptoms, enhance mental well-being, and improve overall quality of life for the women prisoners involved.



Pro Bono Partnerships: Nurturing Justice for the Marginalized

or nearly two decades, the Committee has been at the forefront of advocatinf for the rights of marginalized prisoners in Sindh. We extend our deepest gratitude to our probono partners, especially Mr. Hasan Mandviwalla, who recently visited the Women's Prison and Central Prison Karachi. His dedication to following up with old clients and assessing the cases of prisoners awaiting appeal decisions in the Supreme Court exemplifies the transformative power of pro bono lawyering.





We applaud law firms and corporate practices that share our commitment to pro bono lawyering and human rights matters. Their tireless efforts are instrumental in providing marginalized prisoners and other vulnerable populations with access to justice. By showcasing their pro bono work and engaging in advocacy efforts, these organizations and individuals play a pivotal role in promoting human rights and contributing to positive social change. The Committee welcomes and encourages continued collaboration with law firms and corporate practices that align with our mission.

Committee and JAS Travels Collaborate to Repatriate Foreign National Prisoner from Women's Prison Karachi

n the pursuit of justice and compassion, the Committee continues to address challenges faced by Foreign National Prisoners (FNP) from developing countries. One of the most significant hurdles they encounter is arranging funds for their journey home after completing their sentences.

The Committee is pleased to share the successful repatriation of a Nigerian prisoner who recently completed her sentence in the Women's Prison Karachi. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to JAS Travels for their invaluable support in this endeavor. JAS Travels demonstrated their commitment to humanitarian causes by generously covering 50% of the prisoner's airfare,



significantly easing the financial burden associated with international repatriation.

The Committee looks forward to future collaborations and endeavors that uphold the principles of justice, compassion, and human dignity.

Committee's Visit to Hyderabad Region Reinforces Commitment to Fairness

n our unwavering commitment to fairness, client satisfaction, and delivering effective legal services, the Committee's dedicated team conducted a productive visit to the Hyderabad Region in November.

During the visit, our team actively engaged with under-trial prisoners who are represented by the Committee. Visits to the District and Sessions Courts, coupled with interactions at the prisons in the region, provided a valuable opportunity to understand the unique challenges faced by individuals awaiting trial. Interviews with under-trial women prisoners further emphasized our commitment to ensuring client satisfaction and delivering comprehensive representation.





Integral to our visit were strategic discussions with Superintendents at the prisons. These sessions allowed us to exchange insights, address challenges, and foster collaborations that enhance the overall efficiency of legal services. By aligning our strategies with Prison Administrators, we aim to create an environment that prioritizes fairness and the well-being of under-trial prisoners.

Empowering Inmates: Committee's Training Session and Health Workshop at Central Prison Hyderabad

n its ongoing commitment to empowering those within the prison system, the Committee conducted a comprehensive training session and health workshop at the newly established training center in Central Prison Hyderabad. The event brought together legal experts and health professionals to share knowledge and enhance the well-being of the incarcerated population



Led by our team members, Mr. Zahid Ali Messo and Ms. Shaista Urooj, and lawyer Mr. Abdullah Soomro, the training session delved into vital topics such as Alternate Dispute Resolution, Fundamental Rights, and Rights for Religious Minorities. The interactive nature of the session allowed for a productive question and answer segment, addressing various legal queries from the engaged attendees. To further support their legal journey, attendees were introduced to the Sindh Legal Advisory Call Centre (SLACC) as a valuable resource for additional assistance.

Dedicated to health and hygiene, Dr. Muhammad Ahmed Khan, a respected Doctor and Hygiene Management Expert, led an enlightening session on Health, Wash, and Hygiene Management. His session covered the significance of hygiene, hands-on hygiene management activities, and exemplary practices. This session aimed not only to educate but to instill habits that contribute to the overall well-being of the incarcerated community.

Children's Day Celebration at Early Learning Center, Women's Prison Karachi & Hyderabad

A midst the confines of the Women's Prison Karachi & Hyderabad, at Early Learning Center, as we cherished the laughter and curiosity of the children in ELC, we extend our thoughts and compassion to those facing adversity in faraway lands, particularly the children of Gaza on Children's Day.

We came together in the belief that every child, regardless of their circumstances, deserves a childhood filled with joy, possibilities, and boundless dreams.







Early Learning Center Progress Meeting and Back-to-School Event

ur quarterly progress meetings with the mothers serve as a means to update mothers on their children's development and provide a platform for open discussions and addressing any concerns they may have.

During this progress meeting, the students were provided with new backpacks, uniforms, and stationary for the upcoming term. This initiative not only addresses practical needs but also instills a sense of pride and excitement in the young learners.

The event was graced by esteemed guests, DIG Women's Prison & YOIS Sheeba Shah and Superintendent Humaira Qayoom.





Generous Donation Brings Winter Relief to Women Prisoners and Young Offenders in Hyderabad

onations, both big and small, have the potential to make a significant impact on the lives of prisoners. They go beyond providing physical comfort; they send a powerful message of community support, empathy, and the belief in the possibility of positive change.



We are thrilled to share heartwarming news made possible by a generous private donation—essential winter items have been distributed to women prisoners at Women's Prison Hyderabad and young offenders at YOIS Hyderabad. This act of kindness has not only brought physical warmth but also a sense of care and compassion to those within the confines of these facilities.

Justice SUCCESS STORIES

Muhammad*

uhammad*, a 57-year-old resident of Sanghar, the backbone of his family, worked as a laborer, earning a modest Rs. 20,000 per month to support his five dependents. Life took an unexpected turn when he found himself facing imprisonment in District Prison Sanghar, accused of selling drugs in a case he believed was baseless.

Muhammad, hailing from a poor and needy background, could not afford a private advocate to represent him. Desperate for help, he approached the Committee during a weekly visit to District Prison Sanghar. There, he met Mr. Hussain Bux Chang, a dedicated advocate, who took up Muhammad's case.



*Pseudonym used to protect privacy.

His vakalatnama was filed on October 10, 2023 initiating the legal proceedings. As the case unfolded, Mr. Chang meticulously examined the records, uncovering discrepancies in the size and quantity of the alleged drugs. These crucial points were brought to the Court's attention, creating doubt about Muhammad's involvement in the alleged crime.

After thorough assessment and consideration of these discrepancies, the Court declared Muhammad innocent, lifting the burden of criminal charges from his shoulders. On December 11, 2023, Muhammad walked out of prison, free from the false accusations that had threatened to shatter his life.

Justice SUCCESS STORIES

Hasan*

15 year old Hasan from Karachi, with four siblings, found himself entangled in a false case of dacoity, landing him behind bars in a remand home in Karachi. Coming from a background of poverty and need, he lacked the means to hire a private advocate to plead his case.

During a visit to the remand home, Hasan sought legal assistance. Mr. Waqar Mallah, an advocate from the Committee, took on the responsibility of representing Hasan. The vakalatnama was filed on October 4, 2022.

As the case progressed, Mr. Mallah pointed out critical flaws in the prosecution's presentation. The case property had not been submitted, and the complainant had been absent from court for an extended period. Furthermore, Mr. Mallah argued that the available evidence on record was sufficient to prove



*Pseudonym used to protect privacy.

Hasan's innocence, leaving no room for conviction. The court, after considering these arguments, declared Hasan innocent and acquitted him from the case on November 2, 2023.

Hasan*

oor, a 60-year-old senior citizen from Karachi, faced a challenging ordeal that eventually led to his triumph over false accusations. Working as a laborer and earning a modest Rs. 15,000 per month, he supported his family of four, including one son and one daughter. Unfortunately, Noor found himself unjustly imprisoned in District Prison Malir on charges of committing robbery.

Living hand to mouth and unable to afford a private advocate, Noor reached out for help during interviews conducted by our team of advocates at District Prison Malir. Mr. Fayyaz Ahmed Kalhoro, an advocate from the Committee, took up his case. On July 10, 2023, Mr. Kalhoro filed the vakalatnama, initiating the legal process.



*Pseudonym used to protect privacy.

As the case unfolded, the Court scrutinized the relevant documents, revealing numerous ambiguities. Discrepancies between the witness statements and the facts mentioned in the FIR, coupled with a lack of sufficient evidence on record, raised doubts about Noor's involvement. Considering these inconsistencies, the Court declared Noor innocent on October 18, 2023, lifting the weight of criminal charges from his shoulders.

Remarkably, it took only three months and nine days to bring the matter to a conclusion.

Justice SUCCESS STORIES

Bashir*

B ashir, a 16-year-old boy from Hyderabad, came from an impoverished background. Bashir was an orphan, navigating life's challenges on his own. Unfortunately, he found himself imprisoned in the Youthful Offender Industrial School (Y.O.I.S) in Hyderabad, falsely accused of rape and keeping stolen property. Although the Committee only represents first-time petty offenders, upon special referrals through Prison Administration or Courts, the Committee represents women and young offenders implicated in heinous offenses unable to afford private lawyers.

In his time of need, Bashir's case was entrusted to Mr. Abdullah Soomro, an advocate from the Committee. On October 19, 2023, Mr. Soomro filed the vakalatnama. Bashir was granted bail on humanitarian grounds when presented in Court for remand, allowing the case to progress.



*Pseudonym used to protect privacy.

As the legal proceedings unfolded, the Court conducted a thorough assessment of the case records, including the FIR, challan, evidence, and the statement of the accused. Mr. Soomro skillfully presented arguments, highlighting significant contradictions in the prosecution's witness statements. Discrepancies in the timing of the memo of arrest, the place of arrest, and the distance between the police station and the place of arrest revealed the prosecution's failure to prove the case against Bashir.

With a keen eye for detail, the Court declared Bashir innocent, releasing him from the false and baseless charges on December 6, 2023.

Free Legal Advisory Camps

he Committee prioritizes provision of legal aid across prisons in Sindh, including efforts towards increasing prisoners' awareness regarding right to legal aid and ways to seek legal aid services.

Between October and December 2023, we successfully organized 22 free legal advisory camps for prisoners. The camps witnessed the active participation of 664 under-trial prisoners, including adult men, women and juvenile prisoners who benefited from free legal advice.





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