



No.2(119)/21-Chair-NCHR  
GOVERNMENT OF PAKISTAN  
NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS  
5<sup>th</sup> Floor Evacuee Trust Complex, F-5/1,  
Agha Khan Road, Islamabad.



Islamabad, the 21<sup>st</sup> August, 2023

Open Letter to the Hon. Prime Minister of Pakistan

Dear Hon. Prime Minister,

The National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) is a statutory body set up under the NCHR Act 2012 for the promotion and protection of human rights as provided under the Constitution, domestic law and international human rights treaty frameworks that Pakistan has ratified.

Following the rampage and burning of churches and homes in Jaranwala, Faisalabad on August 16<sup>th</sup> 2023, a team led by the Chairperson NCHR, Members, Minorities and Punjab visited the area to meet with district administration, religious leaders and families affected by the terrible attacks. The team was informed that a mob of approximately 1200 persons, majority of them youth, attacked and destroyed seventeen churches, approximately 80 homes of which 40 were completely gutted and the remaining badly vandalized.

The level of devastation at Jaranwala is enormous, Besides the economic costs that will arise in repair and rehabilitation, the psychological consequences to an already weak and discriminated community will have long term impacts on the feelings of helplessness felt by our Christian brethren.

NCHR condemns in the strongest terms this recent mob violence. Mob riots and vigilante actions have grown exponentially over the last few years. Incidents of desecration of



places of worship, graveyards and open ferocity against members of vulnerable groups have become commonplace--often with impunity.

State authorities must ensure due process of law and speedy convictions to affirm legal deterrence provided in domestic law to all and every citizen of the country regardless of religion. Despite establishment of comprehensive legal and institutional framework for promotion and protection of human rights, such acts of violence against religious minorities pose serious questions regarding implementation and role of duty bearers.

Analysis of criminal case-files of minorities parties demonstrates numerous problems plaguing police investigations; delays, arrests without probable cause, proceedings in flimsy cases etc.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, a comprehensive assessment of attitudes of administrative and justice sectors reveals a lack of knowledge of specific laws relating to religious minority communities as well as an in-group vs. out-group mentality wherein religious minority communities are usually referred to as the 'Other'. "Arguably, it is this otherization that eventually leads to a denial of rights."<sup>2</sup>

The Commission acknowledges action by the Commissioner Faisalabad which averted loss of life. It appreciates high level public condemnation of this incident, as well as the commitment of the Punjab Government to repair and compensate affectees, however, it is now time to look at long term investment in the protection and uplift of Pakistan's minority communities.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.las.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Access-to-Justice-for-Religious-Minority-Policy-Brief.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid





It is of concern to NCHR, that the landmark judgement on minority rights by Justice Jilani following the Peshawar Church bomb blast in 2013 has still not been fully implemented by the Government. This includes putting into place safeguards for the protection of places of worship of minority groups and setting up special police forces for their safety.

Faisalabad has historically been an area of acrimony and disputes amongst religious groups. It is of concern to NCHR, that no long term program has been developed to de-radicalise the youth of the area and to inculcate a culture of religious tolerance. Furthermore, notified Peace Committees and local police of the area lack the strength, efficacy and courage that is needed in tense situations such as that of August 16<sup>th</sup>.

Additionally, it is of concern to NCHR that in the wake of the attack, a surge of approximately one million social media posts targeted minority community with hate and inflammatory content. According to a Sentiment Analysis by NCHR and B4A, majority of the posts on twitter and Facebook contained content that was inciting and inflammatory in nature.

It is of concern to NCHR, that 60% of bonded labour in Punjab comprises Christian workers and that 80% non-Muslims are employed in low paid and sanitation work and that systemic discrimination against religious minorities is embedded in the socio-political landscape of Pakistan. This discrimination starts from childhood, continuing into adulthood as minority members struggle to join the workforce, participate in politics, claim basic rights of citizenship, and practice their faiths without fear or intimidation.

In view of the above, the National Commission on Human Rights recommends the following measures to be taken by the Government to address long term challenges



arising from extremism and intolerance in society especially against those actions that violate Article 20 of the Constitution of Pakistan- 'Freedom to Profess Religion and Manage Religious Institutions'.

- Government machinery be deployed to speedily investigate the incident using latest technology; geo-fencing, CCTV cameras etc (similar to that used in the May 9th investigation) to gather evidence for prosecution.
- The state, as a party to the prosecution, to assist the courts for early dispensation of justice and follow-up on the later stages of appeal till convictions.
- Government may consider the set up an independent Tribunal or JIT to enquire into the incident
- Establishment of systems of accountability to facilitate and improve investigation. This may be achieved either through District Criminal Justice Coordination Committees formed under the Police Act for instance, or a statutory committee that specifically monitors cases of religious minority communities.
- Provincial government to immediately fulfill its promise to compensate affected Christian families and start early rebuilding of damaged properties, especially Churches.
- Initiate a national programme to curb growing extremism and the de-radicalisation of youth, starting with Faisalabad Division.
- Implement legislations and policies that address dangerous speech and online harassment, ensuring that they adhere to international human rights norms and standards, and effectively deter future instances of hate speech while respecting freedom of expression Closely revisit the Single National Curriculum through nationwide consultations with religious minority groups so as to remove



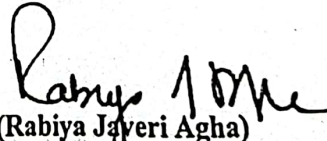


apprehensions and create emphasis on human rights and citizen's responsibilities for a more tolerant and responsible society.

- Most importantly, call for an implementation audit of the Justice Jillani Judgement SMC1 of 2014 from all federating units. This judgement is a substantive document that sets in place important provisions for the protection of religious minorities including requiring the setup of a 3-member bench to ensure its operationalization.

In its independent capacity, the Commission will continue to review safeguards provided by or under the Constitution of Pakistan or any other law for the protection of human rights and recommend measures for their effective implementation. It is hoped that the Hon. Prime Minister will look into these recommendations and ensure that each and every citizen—irrespective of religion—is ensured due process of law, justice and a future free from bigotry, hate and violence.

Yours Sincerely,

  
(Rabiya Javeri Agha)  
Chairperson (NCHR)