



# Life at risk

Report of HRCP Working Group on Communities  
Vulnerable because of their Beliefs



Human Rights Commission of Pakistan



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Vulnerable because of their Beliefs)*

*April 2011*



**Human Rights Commission of Pakistan**



***Published by***  
**Human Rights Commission of Pakistan**  
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***Jacket designed by Visionaries Division***

***Printed at Anwar Fayyaz Printers***  
Mission Road, Lahore

***ISBN # 978-969-8324-39-1***

**April 2011**



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# Introduction

The traditional threats and discrimination faced by members of religious minority and vulnerable communities in Pakistan have steadily multiplied over the last few years in conjunction with militancy, growing intolerance and the rise to power of violent extremists in parts of Pakistan. That has left these communities feeling acutely threatened by the growing violence and hate directed against them. The factors of a rise in excesses against these communities include not only the advance of militants and religious extremist elements but also the government's failure to take effective steps to protect the basic human rights of members of minority and vulnerable communities.

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan is guided by international human rights law, especially while monitoring the human rights situation in relation to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Domestic legislation departs from and at times is ambiguous regarding the principles of human rights on freedom of religion, belief and conscience.

In June 2010, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) established a Working Group on Communities Vulnerable because of their Beliefs, in order to highlight the challenges and discrimination faced by the minority and vulnerable communities across Pakistan on account of their belief and to suggest an appropriate response. HRCP considers 2010 a bad year for the minorities in Pakistan and all indications suggested that there were worse times ahead. The need to establish the working group was felt on account of growing incidents of violence against and intolerance and discrimination towards members of minority and vulnerable communities across the

country.

Although the problems facing various minority communities are not identical many challenges they face are not very dissimilar. The working group was envisaged as a joint forum for the minority and vulnerable communities to enable them to come together on common issues, exchange views on the various problems and possible solutions as well as magnify their voice and combine efforts to engage with civil society and political parties to effect positive change.

Its work was aimed at raising awareness about all forms of violence, threats of violence and discrimination on account of religious belief—whether the perpetrator was the state or non-state actors—and striving to improve the situation through changes in law/policy and implementation, leading to prevention of discrimination and effective protection of basic rights and freedoms of all citizens.

The mandate of the working group included initiatives to highlight human rights violations or concerns; analysis of laws/practices/policies that are discriminatory or give preferential treatment to the majority religious group; analysis of the circumstances that allow advocacy of hatred based on religious beliefs; engaging in a constructive dialogue with the civil society and policy makers to lobby for change; identification of best practices/strategies and considering possibilities of building on them; consideration of ways and means to issue early warnings in situations of risk of unrest or violence targeted against minorities; and capacity-building of members of vulnerable communities to enable them to work effectively for the protection and promotion of their rights. The working group's mandate also included the rights of vulnerable sects of Islam whose beliefs do not conform to the major sects' beliefs and ideas.

The working group held two meetings in its first calendar year, on June 11 and December 11, 2010. Both meetings were held in Karachi and were attended by HRCP members and representatives of the Ahmedi, Bahai, Christian, Hindu, Muslim, Sikh and Zoroastrian (Parsi) communities from across Pakistan. The group members gathered information from their respective communities. The group benefitted from the perspective and expertise of lawmakers and lawyers among the participants.

Participants in the two meetings of the working group included Mitra Irani, Kermin Parakh, Rehana Hakim, Kalpana Devi Advocate, Promila, Pushpa Kumari, Rochi Ram Advocate, Kersasp Shekhdar, Ratan Chand, Inder Ahuja, Suresh Rajani Advocate, Father Robert Pascal, Dr Sabir Michael, Dominic Stephen, Noman Peter, Sardar Krishan Singh, Shamsheer Ali, Gul Gurnani, Dur-e-Sameen, Rana Ghulama Mustafa, Munawwar Shahid, Zahid Farooq, Waheed Fazal, Maria Ismail, and minority members of the Sindh Assembly Saleem Khokhar Advocate and Pitanber Sewani. HRCP Sindh chapter Vice

Chairperson Ghazi Salahuddin, HRCP Secretary General I. A. Rehman, Programme Coordinator Najam U Din and HRCP Council members including Zohra Yusuf, Parveen Soomro, Uzma Noorani, Roland deSouza, Asad Iqbal Butt, Amarnath Motumal Advocate, Abdul Rehman Jan Sarhandi and Badar Soomro also attended the meetings.

In the two meetings the working group considered issues including the status of the Commission for Minorities; advocacy of hatred based on religious beliefs; discrimination in services and education; family/personal law for minorities; property-related issues, including property dedicated to places of worship; and issues such as forced conversions.

Although a section of HRCP's annual report covers human rights of the minority and other vulnerable communities every year, in view of the growing excesses against minority religious communities and the grave nature of the issues facing these communities it was felt that a separate report was necessary to depict the difficulties that minority and vulnerable communities in the country faced.

This first report of the working group is the result of input from members of the group, monitoring of the prevailing situation of minorities and events in 2010 and the first three months of 2011. The rights have not only been looked at in the context of constitutional guarantees but also with reference to international human rights law.

# 1. Confusion on the count

Members of minority and vulnerable communities dispute the figures of non-Muslim population in Pakistan based on the last census and complain that their population is not accurately reflected in the official statistics. Generally, official population figures are not available for the relatively smaller minority communities in Pakistan, such as the Buddhists, Sikhs, Bahais, Zoroastrians, as well as the Kalash, who live in three valleys



June 11, 2010: The inaugural session.

in Chitral, high up in the Hindukush mountains on the border with Afghanistan. The Kalash are believed to be descendents of the army of Alexander the Great and are the last surviving animists in Central Asia.

Table 1 is a verbatim reproduction of statistics on population of minority communities available on the website of the Federal Ministry of Minorities. The website does not cite a source for the figures. Efforts to ascertain the source from the ministry officials were unsuccessful as they simply refused to share the source. Members of the working group considered the figures were nominal and the minority population in Pakistan was considerably higher.

**Table 1: Population of minorities in Pakistan according to Ministry of Minorities<sup>1</sup>**

	Punjab	Sindh	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	Balochistan	Total	%age
Christians .....	1,699,843 .....	294,885 .....	36,668 .....	26,462 .....	2,057,858 .....	42%
Hindus/Scheduled Castes	116,410 .....	2,280,842 .....	5,090 .....	39,146 .....	2,441,488 .....	50%
Ahmedis/Qadianis .....	181,428 .....	43,524 .....	42,150 .....	9,800 .....	276,902 .....	6%
Others .....	48,779 .....	23,828 .....	14,726 .....	6,471 .....	93,804 .....	2%
<b>Total .....</b>	<b>2,046,460 ..</b>	<b>2,643,079 ...</b>	<b>98,634 .....</b>	<b>81,879 ...</b>	<b>4,870,052 .</b>	<b>100%</b>

The ministry's figures are lower even than those recorded in the 1998 census, the last counting of the country's population, as is evident from tables 2 and 3.

**Table 2: Population of Pakistan by religion according to 1998 census<sup>2</sup>**

Gender	Muslims	Christians	Hindus (Jati)	Qadiani (Ahmedi)	Scheduled castes	Others	Total
Male	66,313,355	1,089,060	1,101,597	145,612	174,675	49,387	<b>68,873,686</b>
Female	61,120,054	1,003,842	1,009,674	140,600	157,668	46,755	<b>63,478,593</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>127,433,409</b>	<b>2,092,902</b>	<b>2,111,271</b>	<b>286,212</b>	<b>332,343</b>	<b>96,142</b>	<b>132,352,279</b>

The Ministry of Minorities (Table 1) purports to give more recent figures, but it is noticeable that the population of all minority and vulnerable communities is lower in the Ministry of Minorities' statistics than the 1998 census figures indicate. Members of the

<sup>1</sup> Available at: <http://www.minorities.gov.pk/>, last visited on March 21, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> 1998 Census Report of Pakistan, p. 207.

working group wondered why the population of these communities did not have a ratio of growth similar to the Muslim population.

**Table 3: Comparison of minority population figures**

Source	Christians	Hindus (Jati) including scheduled castes	Qadiani (Ahmedi)	Others	Total
<b>1998 census report ..</b>	2,092,902 .....	2,443,614 .....	286,212 .....	96,142 .....	<b>4,918,870</b>
<b>Ministry of .....</b>	2,057,858 .....	2,441,488 .....	276,902 .....	93,804 .....	<b>4,870,052</b>
<b>Minorities</b>					
<b>Difference .....</b>	-35,044 .....	-2,126 .....	-9,310 .....	-2,338 .....	<b>-48,818</b>

Although the working group did not have precise figures, there was a general feeling that the population was higher than shown in the census figures and on the Ministry of Minorities' website. The working group members were of the opinion that non-Muslims made up as much as 40 percent of the population in some districts of Sindh. It was felt that the official figures could not be validated and further probe was called for. The working group members also felt that ahead of the next census efforts should be made to ensure that minority population is not under-counted as development schemes, government initiatives and the share in political power for a community were linked to its population. Members of the working group said that accurate statistics were important, because flawed statistics led to flawed policy.

They emphasised that the term 'others' with reference to population of minority communities in Pakistan must be explained and instead of clubbing together figures for relatively smaller religious communities, precise population numbers for each minority community must be given.

Members of the working group said that the population figures may be low because of vested interests or discrimination, but there had also been migration amid lawlessness as well as insecurity caused by target killing, forcible conversions and abduction for ransom of members of minority communities. The working group expressed concern that on account of a number of factors members of the minority communities felt vulnerable and many individuals and families that had chosen to stay in Pakistan after the partition of India and even after subsequent rioting had felt compelled to abandon their homes and migrated abroad in the last few years.

## 2. A dormant commission

The inadequacy of specific mechanisms to redress concerns and complaints of members of minority and vulnerable communities was highlighted.

Meeting a few weeks after United States diplomatic cables leaks by WikiLeaks shed light on views by Pakistan's political and military leadership, the working group concluded that the Commission for Minorities had to be one of the better kept secrets of the government of Pakistan. There was a fair bit of confusion over whether a Commission for Minorities existed in Pakistan, and if it did, how did it operate to safeguard the rights of these communities. The only hint that such a body was in existence came from the occasional official accounts of reports of the commission stating that it had awarded stipends and sanctioned money for renovation of places of worship. It certainly was not common knowledge who the members of the commission were and little consultation was held with the minority communities for their nomination.

In May 2009, National Assembly's Standing Committee on Minorities had expressed reservations about the performance of the National Commission for Minorities and had observed that "since its establishment, the Commission has not been able to protect and safeguard religious, social and cultural rights of the minorities" in Pakistan.

The working group unanimously agreed that while it might be a commission in name, the body was completely devoid of the substance of what such a commission should be and for whose establishment demands had been made since the 1980s.

The working group called the incumbent Commission for Minorities a sham, and observed that it was neither independent nor autonomous and had come into existence



December 11, 2010: The debate resumed.

through an executive order. They said that unless at least some minimum requirements were met it was certain that a commission for minorities would not be able to do much to safeguard the rights of members of the minority and vulnerable communities. They noted that there was virtually no contact information for the commission even on the website of the government of Pakistan or the websites of the federal ministries. Such lack of communication with the people abundantly demonstrated the commission's detachment from the very people it should seek to engage in order to effectively protect and safeguard their religious, social, cultural, economic and political rights, the working group concluded. It stressed that that must change urgently and recommended that unlike the present version, a commission for minorities must have the following attributes:

- ◆ It must be a statutory body, established by an act of parliament.
- ◆ The law setting up the commission must also define the body's functions and composition.
- ◆ The commission must have the mandate to address discrimination against minorities in laws, policies and practices.
- ◆ All members of the commission should be named in a transparent manner after meaningful consultation with representatives of the minority and vulnerable communities. Representatives from human rights organisations/ civil society should also be named to the commission.
- ◆ The commission must have an independent status, with its own budget,



secretariat and working procedure.

- ◆ The commission must have the power to receive and entertain complaints and take all measures necessary to redress those complaints.
- ◆ It should also have the authority to refer matters to the court.
- ◆ The commission should submit an annual report to parliament.
- ◆ To make the commission effective, its existence, functions and relevance to the problems of the people must be publicised and access of members of minority communities to it facilitated and ensured.

The working group unanimously concluded that unless these conditions were met, the commission would not be in a position to act as a watchdog for minorities' rights.

### **3. Faith-based hatred, violence and discrimination**

Members of the working group observed that faith-based discrimination, and preaching of hatred and intolerance in Pakistan had roots in the fact that the country's laws, including the constitution itself, did not envision equal rights for all citizens. The textbooks even at the elementary level preached segregation. The issue of teachers inciting hatred against the minorities in schools was raised as a matter of pressing concern by the working group. It was also emphasised that there was an urgent and completely ignored need in Pakistan to educate the students in a manner that they learn to appreciate and respect not just religious, but also cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity. Lack of implementation of the law to deal with those who hurt others' religious feelings was also highlighted as a matter of concern. The working group pointed out that the requirement for Ahmedis to fill out a separate form to get their passports was discriminatory. They emphasised that it was vital to identify and highlight the sources of hatred against the minorities. They said that specific challenges facing the minority communities in Pakistan differed from group to group and place to place.

Hate speech, violence and threats of violence against members of minority and vulnerable communities continued during the period under review, with clerics speaking against the minority and vulnerable communities in religious congregations and Friday prayers sermons. During a Friday sermon in Lahore in June, head of a right-wing political party threatened a fresh movement against the Ahmedi community if it "did

not accept their minority status” and the government kept silent about “their blasphemous and unconstitutional activities”.

The working group was informed that organised hate campaigns against the Ahmedi community continued in parts of the Punjab province, mainly through the use of stickers, wall



A billboard in Ferozewala, near Lahore, a few days after an Ahmedi was murdered in the locality.

chalking and distribution of pamphlets, amid a rise in the intensity of attacks against members of the community.

It was noted that there was little consequence for extremists perpetrating faith-based hate speech, instigating discrimination and hostility towards and, at times, social boycott of members of minority and vulnerable communities. The horrific violence in Gojra in 2009 and in Faisalabad in 2010 were cited as some of the recent examples of violence fueled by hate mongering and abuse of mosque loudspeakers. It was pointed out that although religious parties and extremist clerics were notorious for stoking hatred, divisiveness and violence against non-Muslims and minority Muslim sects, they certainly did not have exclusive monopoly over promotion of hate.

The working group observed that not only had the state been unable to perform its primary duty, of protecting the right to life of its citizens in the case of minority communities, but it had also failed to stem the flow of hate speech through the print and electronic media, which at times based their tirades against the minority and vulnerable communities in outlandish claims of conspiracies against the glory of Islam and Muslims. In one of the most alarming examples of hate speech in recent years, an anchorperson of a popular Urdu TV channel commemorated the 1974 amendment to the Constitution, which declared Ahmedis non-Muslim, by holding a prime-hour discussion on September 7, 2008 that ended with the anchor declaring the Ahmedis *Wajibul Qatl* (liable to be killed). The following day an Ahmedi doctor was shot dead in Mirpurkhas district, Sindh. The day after that, another Ahmedi was assassinated in Nawabshah district of Sindh. The anchor was not even rebuked, much less charged

with the criminal offence that instigation to murder is under Pakistani laws.

The working group noted that impunity for promoters of hate speech had been the norm and official condemnation of preaching of hatred or meaningful legal action against the perpetrators had largely been absent.

Impunity for murder was the other feature of violence against minority and vulnerable communities. A year and a half after the horrific anti-Christian violence in Gojra, not one person had been found guilty of the murders and torching of houses in arson attacks that had led to the death of eight Christians. It was felt that little headway had been made in bringing to justice perpetrators of target killings and other violence directed against the minority and vulnerable communities.

Members of the working group expressed concern over political and religious groups branding members of an entire religious community as agents of other countries and the state's failure to ensure protection against such intimidation as well as to prosecute those perpetrating such propaganda. Hindu members of the group said that they often feared and faced backlash in Pakistan in the form of discrimination and violence for any perceived excesses against Muslims in India. They said that they had suffered "reprisal attacks" in the aftermath of the 1992 demolition of Babri Mosque in India.

They said that Hindus in Sindh had felt particularly vulnerable ahead of an Indian high court verdict in September 2010 regarding a dispute over the ownership of the land on which Babri Mosque was built. They said that shortly before the verdict was to be announced Hindu families in many areas had sent their children and women to relatives' houses in Hindu-majority areas for fear of a backlash from Muslim extremists.

The working group stressed that the disempowered segments of minority communities such as bonded labourers, internally displaced persons and lower caste members were exposed to more discrimination than other members of those communities. In the internal displacement crises in Pakistan in recent years, the marginalised minority and vulnerable communities felt a considerably greater sense of disempowerment than others, compounding their problems associated with displacement.

Discrimination on the basis of faith had been reported even amid natural disasters of unprecedented scale, including the massive floods in the summer of 2010. In August last, 500 Ahmedi families displaced from Dera Ghazi Khan, Muzaffargarh and Rajanpur districts of southern Punjab by the floods were reportedly denied relief goods and shelter by government officials and local clerics on account of their faith. The displaced families were expelled from a government school in Dera Ghazi Khan and from rented lodgings elsewhere in southern Punjab following clerics' edicts that the affected Ahmedis

must not be provided help. Christians displaced by the floods in Punjab also complained about discrimination in distribution of relief goods. District officials in Sukkur had reportedly observed Sikhs and Hindus being pushed away from food distribution points. In Karachi, nearly 600 Hindu flood victims staged a protest after they were given beef to eat.

Members of the working group observed that particular vulnerabilities faced by displaced minority communities did not elicit a specific response from the state. The only recent official acknowledgement of specific protection needs of the religious minorities had been the expression of concern by the National Assembly Standing Committee on Minorities in May 2009, over displacement of families of religious minorities from the troubled areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Federally Administered Tribal Areas. Other parliamentary committees have also intermittently expressed concern over threats to the lives and rights of minority communities, mainly in Sindh and Balochistan. In an October 2010 meeting of the Senate Standing Committee on Minorities' Affairs, one senator informed the committee that 500 Hindu families in Balochistan had migrated to India because of threats to their lives and crime, including abduction for ransom.

The working group expressed concern that the liberal political parties were not challenging and confronting the extremists and had in the name of compromise appeased and strengthened forces of obscurantism and done things that were contrary to their manifestos. They said that chairmanship of the Council of Islamic Ideology (CII) had been given away as a reward for political services in the year 2010. They compared the views of the incumbent head of the CII, who is a conservative cleric and an office-bearer of a religious political party, with his predecessor, a widely acclaimed scholar for rational interpretation of Islamic injunctions, and cited the markedly different positions both had held on the blasphemy law.

The working group suggested that professional bodies, including organisations of lawyers, engineers, journalists and doctors should be lobbied and invited to support the campaign to end hate and discriminatory laws. They said that ahead of elections, the political parties should be persuaded to include in their manifestos commitments to that effect.

The working group members appreciated the role of the electronic media in highlighting some of the problems of religious minorities but also emphasised the need to pay attention to the media message on minority rights and the overall manner of reporting on minority issues.

They said that it was another sign of the environment of fear and intolerance in the country that enlightened and progressive Islamic scholars had been forced to disappear

from the public sphere or even flee the country on account of threats to their lives after they had expressed their views on the media on matters such as the blasphemy law. They said the media often promoted extremists' agenda and even the journalists that did not do so generally imposed self-censorship out of fear for personal safety.

They said that the atmosphere had become such that people could not engage in a discourse on religion without fear and the media had not helped in creating the atmosphere needed for a rational debate. It was pointed out that the electronic media generally invited to their programmes religious leaders with a very conservative outlook. The alternative view was not included as progressive and knowledgeable religious scholars were not invited. The working group urged the media to accommodate liberal religious scholars in their talk shows.

It was observed that minority rights activists should contact editors of newspapers and convey their concerns and complaints regarding the coverage of minority issues. It was also recommended that minority communities' leaders should lobby with media organisations, particularly with Urdu newspapers, to ensure unbiased coverage. The print and electronic media in Pakistan, especially the Urdu media, should create specialization by assigning separate reporters to cover human rights issues, the working group added.

It emphasised the need for media monitoring, content analysis and keeping record of violations of rights based on a person's religious beliefs and for taking them up with the government and with the United Nations treaty bodies wherever a human rights organisation had the mandate to do that.

The working group members said that discrimination ingrained in law and the constitution was demonstrated by the fact that a non-Muslim could not become the prime minister or president of the country. Members of the working group expressed their concern over built-in biases that citizens who did not study Islamiyat/Islamic studies faced when they attempted general knowledge and other papers where multiple questions about Islamic studies were invariably asked. They said they were effectively being forced to study Islamic studies in violation of Article 22 of the Constitution that explicitly stated that that would not happen.

They said that although non-Muslim students had the option of appearing in the paper of ethics rather than that of Islamic studies, the Islamic studies question paper specifically stated that any students attempting that paper would get 30 percent additional marks. They said that anyone attempting the ethics paper would be foregoing the additional marks and students therefore felt compelled to attempt the Islamic studies paper. A member of the working group cited a written test in the Sindh Public Service Commission exams, and said that at least four questions were from Islamic studies.

She said that students who had studied ethics and not Islamic studies all their student life were at an obvious disadvantage.

Members of the Hindu community from Balochistan said their children faced a number of problems in admission to cadet colleges as at the time of test all candidates were required to appear in the paper of Islamic studies. They said that non-Muslim children should not be forced to study any religion other than their own. They said that if a Hindu child was admitted to a cadet college he was given the same food as Muslims, including beef, when it was against the child's belief to eat beef.

Members of the working group noted that education was not inclusive and there was nothing positive in the textbooks about non-Muslims, nor a mention of their contributions to the country. In fact, religious minorities were humiliated through textbooks, which fueled hatred and misperceptions about other religions and talked only about Islam and not about any of the other religions. The textbooks did not even talk about Jesus Christ, Buddha or revered figures of any religion other than Islam. Emphasising curriculum reform, they demanded that textbooks must not portray the superiority of one community over another. They said that hatred against members of minority communities could be curbed by way of exchange of views.

They conceded that it might be difficult to teach all religions at educational institutions, and that there might also be issues of availability of teachers. However, at least ethics, positive values and peaceful coexistence promoted by all religions should be taught. Members of religious minority communities must not be excluded from serving in any institution of the state, including those that are considered sensitive, such as the army, the intelligence agencies, and in the Foreign Ministry. They said that many state



A hardline cleric addressing a rally in Peshawar offered a reward for anyone who killed Asia Bibi, a Christian farmhand convicted on charges of blasphemy.

institutions failed to benefit from the talents of citizens of minority religious faiths by placing bars on minority members from joining those services and giving those citizens a heightened sense of disempowerment. They urged a merit-based system that ensured equal opportunity for every citizen without any discrimination on the basis of religion, ethnicity, gender or any other reason.

A member of the working group claimed that when he had applied for a job at an Atomic Energy Commission institute in Sindh, he had been informed that non-Muslims were not recruited at the institute.

The working group members said that the quota in government jobs reserved for non-Muslims was not being implemented judiciously. They said the quota was generally observed in low-level jobs such as sanitary workers and peons, without giving the due share of senior ranks to these citizens. They asked why there were so few teachers, magistrates and senior government officials and almost no judges or ambassadors from religious faiths other than Islam. They said a few years earlier—soon after the introduction of the local government system by then President Gen Pervez Musharraf—advertisements for sanitary workers in Karachi had specified that the workers should be non-Muslim. They demanded that the job quota for religious minorities should be implemented across the board.

They said that in the context of discrimination the basic laws and official policy needed to be looked at. The members said that legal discrimination against religious minorities and the government's failure to address religious persecution by Islamist groups enabled atrocities against religious minority groups. They said that no law could make anyone like a person, but if a law stated that one citizen was inferior and another superior, then the feeling of disliking would increase. The working group pointed out a number of laws in Pakistan that created such an atmosphere in the country. They cited the Objectives Resolution of the constitution as well as the bar on non-Muslim citizens taking key positions in the government. They said that there was specific legal discrimination and persecution against Ahmedis in law, including a constitutional provision declaring them non-Muslim and a provision of the criminal law under which their shabby treatment was often justified.

The education curriculum as a government policy stated that Muslims were superior and members of certain faiths were conspirators. Such things were engendered in society and the poor and the ignorant were fed on that. The working group strongly recommended that among the first things that needed to be done to tackle faith-based hatred must include making appropriate changes in the curriculum. All violations needed to be tackled in accordance with the law. They said that the blasphemy law could be applied to anyone but it was the misuse of this law that was the issue. Minorities were





Mumtaz Qadri, centre, the killer of Governor Salman Taseer, was garlanded when he was brought to a court in Islamabad.

not being protected because they were not considered equal citizens.

They said that Pakistan was envisaged as the homeland for what was a minority in undivided India. Therefore, it was expected that minority communities would be treated better in Pakistan because the majority in the new country could relate to the sentiments of minorities having had the experience of being a minority itself. However, they lamented that that had not happened. The working group said that discrimination was both an economic and a social factor. Christians were deemed unclean and often considered fit only for jobs of sanitary workers. One speaker said that even offices of some multinationals in Pakistan kept separate pots for their Christian and Muslim staff.

Members of the Hindu minority faced a more complex problem on account of divisions and discrimination based on their caste system, which made some members of the community more vulnerable and marginalised than others. Women from the minority communities also often face double discrimination and disempowerment, from the majority and from the patriarchal society. It was observed that a considerable number of bonded labourers in Sindh were from the Hindu community and a large number of women in their families did not even have identity cards.

Minorities' rights and concerns seldom found a mention in manifestos of political parties and even when they did there were many a slip between commitments made in political manifestos and implementation. Similarly, international human rights treaties

were signed but implementation remained lacking. Some speakers said that politicians had a clear understanding of the challenges facing the minority and vulnerable communities but how they would act to address those challenges remained to be seen.

The working group observed that the mindset of the people needed to be changed and without that little change was possible even if legal provisions such as the blasphemy law were repealed. A religious extremist's whims for violence would not be dictated by law, it added.

It expressed concern that in Punjab banners bearing the name of the government's Auqaf Department had called for murder of Ahmedis. Mosque loudspeakers were used to deliver sermons instigating people to kill Ahmedis and earn a place in heaven. The fact that the instigators were consistently not proceeded against showed not only the administration's failure but also its complicity, the working group concluded.

Although precise figures were not available, it was pointed out that the literacy and employment rates in the main minority communities were considerably lower than the national average. Members of the working group spoke about unemployment and frustration among the youth in the minority communities.

It was considered that the matter of discrimination in services and education for the minority and vulnerable communities would be discussed at greater length in future meetings when more data became available.

## 4. The impact of the blasphemy law

HRCP and members of the working group consider the “blasphemy law,” as Section 295-C of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) is known, as deficient in several respects, not least because it was imposed by a military dictator in the 1980s in the name of religion for political mileage even though it does not have any “divine” sanction, but also because it does not take into account the intent of the accused and has no safeguard to protect those accused of blasphemy to harass them or to settle personal scores. Section 295-C of the PPC makes the death penalty mandatory for blasphemy. The law has been a potent tool in the hands of extremist elements to victimise minority and vulnerable communities. Although the number of Muslims victimised under the blasphemy law is no less than non-Muslims but the latter are targeted predominantly on account of their belief and suffer more mainly because of their vulnerable social standing.

The issue of hate speech is closely linked to blasphemy law. There have been scores of incidents in the country of people being lynched after being implicated in blasphemy cases. Extremist vigilantes instigated by hardline clerics have often taken the matters in their own hands after charges of blasphemy were leveled, without waiting to find out if the allegations were even true. The working group expressed its dismay that the government had seldom brought charges against those who incited or perpetrated such violence.

In July last, two Christian brothers, Sajid and Rashid Emmanuel, accused of

blasphemy were shot and killed on court premises in Faisalabad district of the Punjab province, when they were in police custody. The two men were not provided adequate security even though death threats had been made against them earlier. HRCP had called the assassination and escape of the attackers despite police presence scandalous. The killers were not apprehended until this report went to the press. The two brothers' murder once again demonstrated that in Pakistan the mere charge of blasphemy, however preposterous it may be, amounted to a conviction in itself. As witnessed during the appalling incidents of Gojra in 2009, in this case also no action was taken to prevent abuse of mosque loudspeakers to instigate violence that manifested itself in the form of riots and clashes between Christians and Muslims after the two brothers' murder.

Even if the investigations into such murders did not suffer from prejudices based on religious belief, the investigating officers often failed to investigate the matter adequately for fear of personal security, the working group observed.

The blasphemy law became the focus of renewed scrutiny following a death sentence imposed on November 8, 2010, on Aasia Bibi, a peasant from Sheikhpura district in the Punjab province who was charged under the law following a June 2009 row with fellow workers who refused to drink water she had touched, arguing that it had become unclean because she was a Christian.

Her conviction was followed by protests by the Christian community and Pakistani and international human rights organisations, calling for her release and for the president to exercise his constitutional powers to pardon her. Religious groups threatened anarchy if the government granted clemency to Aasia, mobilising protestors onto the streets. The government that had initially given signals that Aasia would be pardoned did an about turn in the face of pressure from extremist elements.

The government was criticised for not tackling the blasphemy law reform prior to Aasia Bibi's conviction and even then responding with half-hearted measures. By that time sentiments had been ignited by radical elements to such a degree that any reform of the law became practically impossible in the short term.

The working group observed that it was tragic and expected in equal measures when in early December 2010 the main cleric of the famous Mahabat Khan Mosque in Peshawar announced in a brazen declaration of criminal intent a reward of half a million rupees for anyone who murdered Aasia Bibi, whose appeal against her conviction was pending in the Lahore High Court at the time. The cleric of the historic Peshawar mosque said: "No president, no parliament and no government has the right to interfere in the tenets of Islam. Islamic punishment will be implemented at all costs." He is reported to have told a rally, "We will strongly resist any attempt to repeal laws which provide protection to the sanctity of Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)... Anyone who

kills Aasia will be given Rs 500,000 in reward from Masjid Mohabat Khan... We expect her to be hanged and if she is not hanged then we will ask the mujahideen and the Taliban to kill her.”

No action was taken against the cleric even though incitement to murder is not only an offence under Pakistan’s criminal law but also amounts to encouragement to violate Article 9 of the Constitution of Pakistan, which enshrines the most fundamental of human rights guarantees that “no person shall be deprived of life or liberty save in accordance with the law”.

Such announcements and denunciations encouraging pre-meditated murder, which are later justified in the name of the culprit’s belief, have not been rare. According to statistics compiled by the National Commission for Justice and Peace, as many as 34 people accused of blasphemy under Section 295 of the PPC had been killed extrajudicially from 1986 until the end of 2010. Around half of these people were Muslims and the rest belonged to other faiths. That figure alone showed that those charged under the blasphemy law suffered persecution, but families of the individuals so charged also often found that no matter how unfounded the charge they had little choice but to relocate on account of threats to their safety to places where their identity or the fact that a family member had been charged with blasphemy were not known, the working group observed.

The murder of Punjab Governor Salman Taseer on January 3, 2011 by one of his police guards—Mumtaz Qadri, who said he had killed the governor for blaspheming by advocating clemency for Aasia and by publicly voicing his opinion against the blasphemy law—demonstrated the hazards involved in voicing support for a blasphemy accused or discussing the law. Taseer had visited Aasia Bibi in jail and promised to convey her petition for pardon to the president. Clerics had issued an edict against Taseer a few days earlier, stating that he had become an apostate by supporting Aasia. The fact that the governor was killed by a member of his own security detail and other guards looked on passively for nearly one minute as Qadri fired all the bullets of his automatic weapon at the governor underscored the extent to which extremists had permeated the law enforcement agencies as well as the government’s inability or unwillingness to root out such elements from the agencies.

The conduct of the government was criticised in the events leading up to Taseer’s assassination. The government had announced its intention to amend the blasphemy law and the president had ordered a ministerial review that concluded that the verdict against Aasia was legally unsound.

However, on November 25, the federal law minister announced that there would be no change in the blasphemy law under his watch. “[A]s long as I am law minister,

no one should think of finishing this law,” he is reported to have said in a written statement to a newspaper. On November 29, amid reports that President Asif Zardari was to use his constitutional power to pardon Aasia Bibi, the Lahore High Court ordered the president against using his authority under Article 45 of the Constitution to pardon her. Article 45 of the Constitution empowers the president to grant pardon, reprieve and respite, and to remit, suspend or commute any sentence passed by any court, tribunal or other authority.

Although the high court order was criticised by human rights organisations and senior lawyers, mainly because it was passed on an executive action that had not in fact occurred and because it suspended the constitutional prerogative of the Executive, comparisons were also made between how the president had acted without delay in using his authority to pardon the federal interior minister in May 2010 after a court had revived his prison sentence and how the president had taken nearly three weeks to consider a pardon for Aasia Bibi although a ministerial inquiry had called the trial court verdict legally unsound.

In the last week of December, the government publicly announced that it would not repeal or amend the blasphemy law. The retreat by the government was criticised as appeasement of extremist groups and not only marginalised tolerant voices but left Governor Taseer, former information minister Sherry Rehman — who proposed legislation to amend the blasphemy law — and Federal Minister for Minorities Shahbaz Bhatti — who spoke in support of Aasia and called the offer of a reward for her murder “immoral, unjust and irresponsible” — more vulnerable and isolated and made life even more difficult for the persecuted minorities.

Bhatti, the federal minister for minorities, was killed in Islamabad on March 1 when his car was attacked by three gunmen. Bhatti had said that religious decrees had been issued calling for him to be beheaded, by extremist clerics in the country. He had expressed the fear that he would be “the highest target” following the assassination of Governor Taseer for speaking out against the blasphemy law.

The working group noted that previous attempts by the government to reform the blasphemy law had been stalled as much by opposition from hardliner groups as by lack of foresight and perhaps commitment.

A glance at developments in the year 2010 characterised not only the government’s flip-flopping on reform of the blasphemy law but also showed how it habitually lost its nerve in the face of intimidation by extremists after flirting with the idea of reform. In February 2010, the federal minister for minorities’ affairs, Shahbaz Bhatti, stated that the government planned to change the blasphemy law to check its misuse by extremists. The minister said the government was proposing the legislation to counter “some

elements [that] misuse the law to create violence and disharmony in society”. He did not say when the government planned to propose the amendments or what the precise amendments would be, although they were generally believed to be changes in procedure to incorporate safeguards against abuse of the law.

However, the federal law minister stated on November 25—amid calls for changes in the law, and for the president to use his authority to pardon Aasia Bibi and protests by the hardliners against any



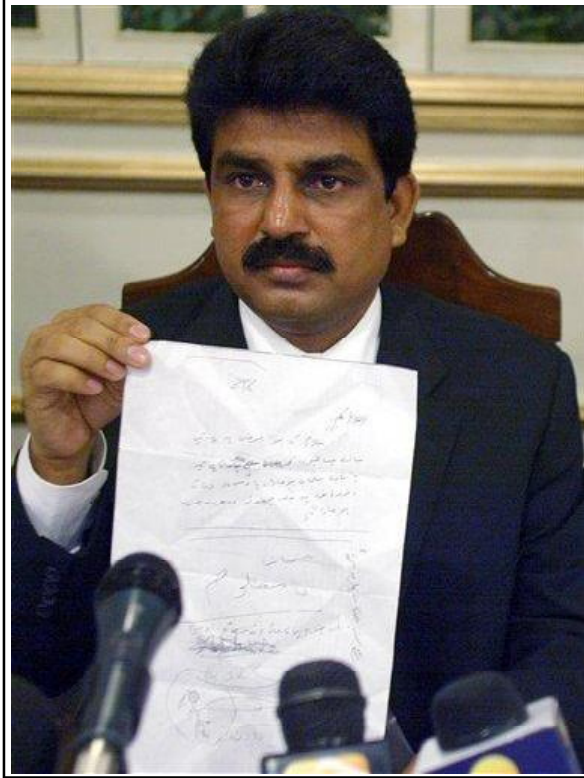
Salman Taseer: The price of kindness.

such action— that there would be no change in the law. On December 30, the government announced that it had “no intention” to repeal or amend the blasphemy law.

Members of the working group felt that the government was being blackmailed by extremist elements. They said that judges dared not ask mobs to leave the proceedings in blasphemy cases. The evidence recorded in blasphemy cases was such that the witnesses were not even allowed to say what the accused had said because that would amount to blasphemy, they said, adding that the requirements of the law and constitutional guarantees of fair trial were seldom met.

The working group noted that although decisions such as Aasia Bibi’s conviction were often overturned on appeal, it was a matter of concern that trial court judges felt compelled to make such decisions. Judges hearing blasphemy cases feared for their own lives, and a judge of the high court had even been murdered. The government had not shown the initiative in seeking to rectify the shortcomings of the blasphemy law, the working group added.

It said that the role of the judiciary had been very conservative, urging the government and the judiciary not to succumb to the intimidation and extremist views



Shahbaz Bhatti: Silenced for speaking his mind.

of a small minority.

In late December 2010, media reports suggested that the Council of Islamic Ideology (CII) had recommended amendments to stop the abuse of the blasphemy law.<sup>3</sup> The CII is Pakistan's top constitutional advisory body on Islamic injunctions. It stated that the government should take all appropriate administrative, procedural or legislative measure to stop misuse of the law. The CII recommended a change in the procedure for registration of cases under the blasphemy law, asking that the police must investigate the complaint systematically before registering a case. It reportedly recommended that it should be made obligatory for the complainant to produce

concrete evidence to substantiate the charges while lodging a complaint with the police. Blasphemy cases should be tried by the high courts, members of the CII reportedly observed.

The working group noted that amid increased violence and threats of violence, the civil society found it difficult to even speak about blasphemy law's shortcomings. The threats and intimidation were such that the civil society's ability to initiate a discourse was constrained and their energies were invested not in how to bring about a change but in how to tread carefully without putting themselves in mortal danger.

The working group members said that it was probably true that a change in the blasphemy law in the prevailing situation was very difficult and repeal of the law was even more unlikely but emphasised that the struggle for rights must continue. They called upon the few progressive political parties in the country to take a stand and at

<sup>3</sup> *Top Islamic body proposes changes in blasphemy law, December 19, 2010, The Express Tribune.*



least advocate a practical middle path. They said the government should bring a resolution or introduce a bill to seek changes in the blasphemy law and added that even if such an initiative was turned down it would still send a signal of positive intentions.

They said that while the government may have apprehensions about a backlash from the hardliners if it were to repeal the blasphemy law immediately, introduction of procedural safeguards to prevent abuse could be a good first step. They referred to the vague definition of what constituted blasphemy under the present law and said that the ambiguity needed to be addressed. They said that a safeguard which stipulates that the police could not submit the case to court without prior approval by the state could also be useful in protecting innocent people from abuse of the law.

They said the people must be taken into confidence before that and the rationale for any proposed changes must be explained and positive discussion encouraged to shore up support for any change in the law.

## 5. Issues of primary concern

### a. Family/personal law

According to the Constitution of Pakistan, all communities are entitled to follow their personal laws. Lack of codification of personal laws of some religious minorities leaves regulation of matters such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, etc., to be decided by customary law.

One of the biggest difficulties members of minority communities in Pakistan, including the Hindu, Sikh and Bahai communities, face in this respect is because of absence of a mechanism for registration of marriages. Lack of registration of marriages means that married couples do not have any official certificate showing that they are married. That proves to be a hurdle in acquiring passports for married women. The married couples have to make individual petitions in courts and although the courts readily issue such orders they apply only to the petitioners and are hardly an ideal manner to deal with the absence of a marriage registration mechanism. Lack of registration of marriages also has implications for legal recourse for spouses in case of matrimonial and inheritance disputes.

In February 2010, the Federal Minister for Minorities had informed the National Assembly that the ministry had initiated a consultation process to come up with a

Minority Protection Bill. He had stated that the Hindu, Sikh and Bahai communities had been demanding separate marriage law and the matter would be addressed in the forthcoming Bill. He said that three meetings had been held with representatives of the minority communities and hoped the bill would be presented before the National Assembly within three months. The bill was not presented in the National Assembly until this report was sent to the press.

Some members of the working group expressed reservations about custody of children in Hindu law and said the property share for a Hindu woman in case of demise of her husband was not clear. Some members said that the minority parliamentarians were often not even aware of the technicalities involved in formulation of personal law. It was suggested by the working group members that every minority community should take a proactive role in formulation/codification of personal laws through consultations within the community for paving the way for consensus on a draft law. It was suggested that every community should decide such matters at district level through seminars and consultations, because the community might have divergent views which might be easier to reconcile if consensus was first achieved at the district level.

#### **b. Property-related issues**

There are two kinds of trust property in Pakistan, non-evacuee trust property and evacuee trust property. The Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETPB) was created in Pakistan with the stated objective of protecting lands and other property linked to non-Muslim religious sites. However, members of the working group said that the ETPB could not protect or administer such properties. Representatives of the Hindu community said that Hindu evacuee trust property was the property of temples, gods and idols. That property was to be used in accordance with the philosophy of Hinduism. They said that a Muslim could not administer Hindu evacuee trust property simply because he did not believe in that philosophy and could not obey the idol because he neither worshipped the idol nor had faith in it. They said that the same was the case with the Muslim institution of Waqaf, a form of trust, which could only be administered by a person who believed in Islam. They said that the Hindu evacuee property should be run by Hindus and asked why the head of the ETPB must always be a Muslim.

Views of members of the Sikh community were not very different. They said that the main threat to land attached to Sikh holy sites in Pakistan came from employees of the ETPB and the land grabber acting in collusion with them. They said that ETPB employees had recently sold land to Defence Housing Authority in Lahore, in violation of the board's own rules that prohibit the sale of any land owned, possessed or maintained

by the ETPB. They said the best way to protect the Sikh holy sites in Pakistan was for those sites to be handed over to Sikhs.

The working group members said that large tracts of land that had been declared enemy property in Sindh under the Defence of Pakistan Rules, after a large number of Hindus who owned the land migrated to India, were being leased to favourites instead of being given to landless peasants.

The working group highlighted the need to document the properties that the Evacuee Trust Property Board and the Enemy Property Board administered. It also emphasised the urgent need to protect the worship places and graveyards of the communities from encroachment and land grabbers. It said that member of minority communities should have decisive say in how properties attached with their holy sites were administered.

### **c. Forced conversions**

Forced conversions have been one of the biggest concerns for minority and vulnerable communities in Pakistan for many years. In October 2010, the Senate Standing Committee on Minorities' Affairs had expressed concern over abduction and forcible conversion of Hindu girls in Sindh and had demanded concrete measures to stop the conversions.

Members of the working group spoke about instances of forced conversions of young girls in Karachi and elsewhere in Sindh. They said that conversions were not a Sindh-specific issue alone and were not confined to any particular gender, faith or locality. They said conversions had different dimensions in Punjab, where often the justification was economic. At times conversion of a girl from a minority faith began with her abduction and/or rape. A claim was later made that the girl had converted to Islam, married a Muslim and did not want to return to her family. Members of the working group said that in such legal challenges, the courts had seldom decided matters of custody of the abducted girl in the family's favour, at times even if the girl in question was no older than 12 or 13. They said that the courts that were asked to adjudicate on such matter invariably came under immense public pressure, in the form or courtrooms packed with slogan-chanting zealots.

Members of the working group noted that scores of incidents of forced conversion were reported in the country every year. They said that there were few genuine cases of conversion in Pakistan and even the instances where the use of overt force was not involved conversions were based on economic pressures, love affairs, or were deemed to be a way to escape discrimination at the workplace or in society at large.

The working group said that everyone should have the right to choose one's religion and no one would have any ground for objection if a conversion was voluntary. Some members suggested formation of an authority by the government that could vouch for

the voluntary nature of conversion. They said that any person who wanted to convert should appear before the authority in a secure environment. The authority should have the powers to protect the person in question and prosecute the accused if coercion was alleged. It was suggested that senior judges and individuals with unblemished credentials should be nominated to the authority. The working group members emphasised that encouragement or facilitation by anyone to a minor to convert to any faith other than her or his own should be made a criminal offence. They demanded that in all cases where conversion of a minor to another faith is alleged, the minor in question should be immediately reunited with the family and should remain with them until reaching adulthood. If upon reaching the age of majority, a person wants to convert to another faith he should have the freedom to do that. The custody of a minor must not be given to anyone other than the family or the guardian of the minor. Members of the working group said that in one incident a magistrate had recorded statement of a 12-year-old girl that she had converted to Islam of her free will, even though the family's lawyer had objected that she was a minor.

#### **d. Representation in parliament**

Members of the working group called for more effective representation for the minorities in parliament. Some members said that they had criticised the previous separate electorate system for minorities as being discriminatory. But now with the joint electorate voters of minority communities had no way of electing members of their faith to parliament or demanding that minority parliamentarians raise their issues. They said that now a political party's head nominated members of minority communities to seats reserved for non-Muslims in parliament and the nominated member often felt obliged to impress only the party chairperson who had the discretion to nominate him in the future. Members of the working group said that under the separate electorate system the minority representatives had to contest elections and therefore they strived to take care of their electorate, knowing that their future as representatives was in the hands of their voters who would hold them accountable in the next elections. They said the nominated parliamentarian from minority communities often did not pay due attention to the problems. Lack of representation of women from the minority and vulnerable communities as well as the Ahmedi community was also highlighted.

Some members said that community representatives shirked issue-oriented discussion and were not willing to touch anything remotely contentious or controversial. The working group emphasised the need to ensure effective representation of minorities in parliament and demanded urgent measures to make the members from the communities accessible and accountable to the communities.

## 6. The way forward

Rather than listing recommendations to improve the situation, the views and suggestions by participants in the working group meetings are being reproduced below, which portray their concerns as well as measures that they believe can bring about a change:

1. Marriages and divorce of couples from minority communities should be registered to resolve their legal, social and family problems.
2. The quota reserved for minority communities must be observed. Special quota seats should be reserved according to the population of a minority community and scholarships should be given to minority students.
3. The National Commission for Minorities is an eyewash. An independent and powerful commission for minorities should be constituted to ensure protection from intimidation and discrimination and to redress the complaints and problems of religious minorities.
4. Lack of tolerance for religious minorities stems from textbooks that teach that members of religious minorities are enemies of Muslims. They fuel insecurity and harassment for the minority and vulnerable communities who are afraid for no reason other than the fact that they do not share the same religious faith as the majority. The curriculum needs to be changed to save children of Pakistan from intolerance and extremism, so that they grow up to be responsible and tolerant citizens. The curriculum discriminates against Hindus in the teaching of the Two-Nation Theory. Parts of the curriculum motivate students to participate in Jihad. Every textbook of every subject

starts with Islamic teachings. Preferential treatment for students attempting Islamiyat/ Islamic studies amounts to forcing the minority students to study Islamiyat which must end. Students from religious minorities must not be forced to study any religion other than their own. Curriculum should be purged of faith-based hatred. Instead of maligning other religions, positive values of all religions should be highlighted. All textbooks from elementary to college level should be revised and screened for hate material and distortion of history. Knowledge about all religions should be imparted to students with an emphasis on humanity and model human values.

5. Holidays should be announced for all members of minority communities on their religious festivals such as Holi and Dewali.

6. The Federal Advisory Council of 1976 should be restored.

7. There should be a quota for needy members of minority communities in Pakistan Baitul Maal funds.

8. Political parties and the government should ensure through legislation adequate representation of minority women at all legislative forums and specific minority rights should be included in the constitution.

9. Laws used by radical elements to victimise and persecute minorities should be substantially revised or repealed.

10. The government must ensure security of life and property of all citizens, irrespective of their religious belief, and must give them real opportunities to practice their religion. Kidnapping for ransom is a big concern for members of religious minority communities, especially in Balochistan. More professional policing and better training of police officials should be provided. It must be ensured that the kidnappers do not have support and sympathisers in the police department.

11. Property of religious minorities administered by the Auqaf Department should be handed over to the minorities.

12. All discriminatory laws, including the constitutional provisions barring non-Muslims from key government positions and the Ahmedi-specific law of 1974, should be abolished. Discrimination in all educational institutions and in employment must be ended. The quota in jobs for minorities should be observed across the board and in all grades. Courts should take courageous decisions with regard to discriminatory laws. The government should announce a constitutional package for protection of vulnerable groups and should declare caste discrimination punishable by law.

13. Students should not be asked about their religion at the time of admission to educational institutions. The column of religion in admission forms of educational institutions and in jobs application forms should be deleted to curb discrimination. Members of religious minority communities should not be barred from joining the military, or any other government agency, merely on account of their faith. Merit

should be the only deciding criterion. Information about students' religion in admission forms for educational institutions exposes these students to intimidation and discrimination because of their faith. Federal and provincial education officials should be engaged to inform them of the situation. Concerted efforts must be made to alleviate the loss of hope and lack of a feeling of belonging among minorities of Pakistan.

14. Every human being should be free to practice her faith. Every citizen must have equal rights and every citizen should have the right to convert to a religion of her or his choice. A high level independent body should be formed to look closely at conversions to ensure that they do not have any element of force. Conversion of minors to another faith should be banned to close the door on forced conversions. The custody of such minor must remain with the minor until the minor attains the age of majority. All those facilitating marriage of a minor should be punished under the relevant law. The government must take a stand on forced conversion of girls from religious minority communities and outlaw any inducement or threat to a minor to convert to another faith.

15. Laws such as the blasphemy law are more harmful to the religious majority and the country at large than they are to non-Muslims. The repeal of such laws is in the interest of the majority in Pakistan if the country is to make progress. Because of this hate and injustice extremism and lawlessness have flourished in the country which threaten national security and stability. In their own interest, Muslims should fight for the rights of non-Muslims. Abuse of the blasphemy law should be penalised without exception. If the blasphemy law is at all indispensable, it should apply to revered figures of all religions.

16. It defies understanding why the government is helpless in the face of hate spewing clerics. The use of mosque loudspeakers and actions of mullah/cleric whipping up hatred against religious minorities should be severely dealt with in accordance with law. Declaration of citizens as infidels and the business of arranging and issue of religious edicts should be made punishable by law. All hate material should be banned and violators prosecuted. Every religious community should review its own literature and eliminate hatred. Such an environment should be created where all citizens of Pakistan can exchange views on religion without fear.

17. The main political parties should be informed about the violations of human rights of minorities in Pakistan. The people should be made aware of the problems of the religious minorities in Pakistan. The state should play its role in this regard. Media's role should be sought to promote humanity and decrease religious extremism. The positive role of the electronic media in highlighting the state of minorities' rights should



be expanded.

18. There must be a transparent mechanism to inspect institutions imparting religious education and their curriculum.

19. Each minority community should learn to look at the bigger picture and join hands with other minority groups to find solutions to shared problems.

20. Members of minority communities at the district level should hold consultations to formulate their views on family/personal law according to their beliefs and customs. Members of Hindu community/*Panchayat* should play a role in formulation of personal law.

21. Discussions should be held with professional bodies of doctors, journalists and representatives of all such bodies and minorities should hold consultations at the national level. The demand to end all divisive laws should be included in the political parties' manifestos.

22. The judiciary in Pakistan now has more power than the government but the judiciary must be bold because it is the only institution that can confront the fanatics.

23. NGOs including the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan should launch more vigorous efforts at the international level to expose the failure of regimes in Pakistan to protect its minorities.

24. There is an urgent need to highlight and confront the faith-based campaigns of hatred being pursued across Pakistan but specifically in parts of Punjab against minorities, Ahmedis in particular. The administration must be asked to stop such campaigns because they endanger human lives.

25. Meetings of the working group should be held in all main cities of the country.

26. Police, the judiciary and other important institutions of the state should be freed from religious pressures, which are undermining dispensation of justice.

27. The role of religion in politics of Pakistan should be ended as has been done in Bangladesh.

28. HRCP should invite moderate Muslim scholars to meetings of the working group.

29. The role of United Nations treaty bodies in implementation of human rights treaties in Pakistan is very unsatisfactory. The UN should not be so happy with signing and ratification of human rights treaties by Pakistan that it fails to keep tabs on progress for implementation. UN bodies should proactively gauge enforcement of the treaties signed by Pakistan.

30. Meaningful efforts must be made to make certain that the minority population is not under-counted. Reasons for members of minority communities feeling compelled to migrate abroad must be addressed.