

**Intervention #4 by H.E. Ms. Hina Rabbani Khar, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of Pakistan, at the 4th UPR of Pakistan**

**(30th January 2023, Geneva)**

**Rights of Minorities**

**Mr. President,**

Principles of non-discrimination and equality before law are embedded in the Constitution and legal framework of Pakistan.

Articles 20, 21, 22, 25, 26, 27, 28, 33 and 36 of Pakistan’s Constitution provide guarantees to minorities for protection, equal participation as well as the right to preserve and promote their cultural identity, values and practices.

Contributions of minorities to our society are many and we are proud of our rich and diverse cultural heritage.

Pakistanis adhering to Christian, Hindu, Sikh, Parsi, and other faiths are an integral part of our social fabric. Places of worship belonging to various faiths, including churches, Temples, and Gurdwaras, can be seen across Pakistan.

In 2019, Pakistan proudly inaugurated Gurdwara Darbar Sahib Kartarpur, which is understood to be the world’s largest Sikh Gurdwara. The same year, Pakistan also reopened a 1000-year-old Hindu temple in Sialkot, which has remained closed for 70 years.

To me these are reflective of Pakistan’s ownership of its rich history of multifaith coexistence.

**Mr. President,**

In this spirit, I can assure you, the Government takes serious notice of any report of forced conversion and marriage of minority girls and undertakes swift law enforcement action against the same.

Our State machinery remains fully committed to safeguarding and advancing minority rights in the country. Any unfortunate incident of violation is isolated, like in many other countries too.

In addition to executive action, the National Commission for Minorities (NCM) is inter alia mandated to look into grievances of any minority community. Likewise, the National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) also has full authority to investigate any incident involving minority rights. In fact, one of the Commission’s Members is from a Minority Community itself.

**Mr. President,**

The Government has instituted wide ranging measures to promote inter-faith harmony and peaceful co-existence in the country.

One of its clear manifestations is enforcement of a strict legal framework against any form of hate speech and hate crime. Under relevant Federal and Provincial laws, law enforcement agencies have standing instructions to curb spread of hateful contents through publication and through loudspeakers. In reported cases, complaints have been lodged against the perpetrators, hateful material confiscated, and convictions done by the competent courts.

Pakistan’s Electronic Media Regulatory Authority has also issued advisory to all TV cable operators and media houses to remain vigilant and immediately report any content, that is aimed at inciting religious discrimination and violence.

Steps have been taken to introduce curriculum for several minorities at the primary level in consultation with their faith scholars. Similarly, Education Curriculum has been revised to promote values of tolerance, mutual respect, inclusiveness and diversity.

District Vigilance and Interfaith Harmony Committees have been established to monitor state of religious sites as well as advance peaceful coexistence through involvement of religious leaders. These Committees have overall done good work in renovation and restoration of places of worship belonging to minorities, among others. By way of example, during financial year 2019-20 to 2021-22, a total of Pak Rupees 125 million were used for renovation and improvement of worship places of minorities in the province.

Likewise, appropriate security measures are in place to protect the sanctity of religious sites belonging to minorities. During important religious occasions, security measures are beefed up on such sites.

As a result of these measures, religious festivals of minorities are observed in a very peaceful manner in Pakistan. It is worth-noting that as a participatory democracy, important religious days of minorities are celebrated officially throughout Pakistan.

Additionally, Pakistan continues to remain among the top destinations for religious pilgrims belonging to Sikh and Buddhism. We have constituted special committees to facilitate travel of religious pilgrims to Pakistan.

**Mr. President,**

Our independent judiciary, civil society and faith organizations have also been seen at the forefront of these measures to promote and protect minority rights in the country.

In 2017, the Supreme Court ruled that any person issuing an edict (fatwa) which harms another person or puts them in harm’s way should be punished under the applicable law.

All religious denominations in Pakistan are represented by their faith organizations, which have played a very important role in awareness raising and advocacy for their fundamental rights and freedoms.

Our civil society partners have been leading voice in this area. For instance, NGOs have been initiating executive and judicial action in some reported cases of regrettable desecration of worship places belonging to minorities.

**Mr. President,**

We thank the recognition by many States for efforts and progress in minority rights. We welcome the constructive feedback received, and we will absolutely positively look into the suggestions made today. Thank you.

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