



7.22.2011

## PAKISTAN New CSW briefing underlines significance of religious freedom for countering extremism

---

In a new briefing on Pakistan, Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) has summarized its core religious freedom concerns with heavy emphasis on the relationship with a broader national crisis in the country.

In the first quarter of 2011, Pakistan experienced a series of high profile religiously-motivated attacks, amidst a near constant flow of unreported ones. On January 4, Salmaan Taseer, Governor of Punjab, was assassinated - groups of lawyers showered his killer with rose petals and rallies of over 30,000 denounced all who, like Taseer, challenged the nation's 'blasphemy laws'. Two months later, Federal Minister for Minorities Affairs, Shahbaz Bhatti, was shot and killed in Islamabad for challenging the same laws. In April, a suicide attack, targeting the Sakhi Sarwar shrine in Punjab during a busy Sufi festival period, killed over 40 people and injured at least 70.

CSW's briefing, '[Pakistan: Religious freedom in the shadow of extremism](#)', describes these incidents as "tragic illustrations of a growing lawlessness and intolerance in Pakistan" and its recommendations include detailed calls for the Government of Pakistan to address issues of false blasphemy accusations, hate speech and impunity, as well as investing in interfaith harmony and educational reform.

On the situation of religious minorities, the briefing makes calls relating to past violence against Christians, anti-Ahmadi legislation and access to justice, as well as asking the government to clarify the remit of the Ministry for Minorities. Since the publication of the briefing, the ministry has been devolved and CSW is working with its partners to push for an alternative federal-level body to represent minorities.

CSW's Advocacy Director Andrew Johnston said, "There is a balance to be struck between giving due importance to the very specific plight of Pakistan's religious minorities and recognizing that the nation as a whole is under threat from an extremism that does not tolerate alternative worldviews and that punishes dissent and difference without regard for individual rights. So while CSW will always continue to support the calls of Christians and other minorities, such as the current demand for the government to fill the gap left by the devolved Ministry for Minorities, we also stand with all those fighting for a more stable, equal and tolerant country. Religious freedom violations and the spread of extremist ideologies are intimately linked to one another and approaches to countering both problems need to incorporate this relationship."

### Notes to Editors:

1. While the Ministry for Minorities has indeed been devolved, the Government of Pakistan has retained the post of Advisor to the Prime Minister on Minorities Affairs, currently held by Dr. Paul Bhatti, brother of the late Shahbaz Bhatti.