



### 3.7.16

## PAKISTAN | Religious Heritage Sites Face Demolition

A number of religious heritage sites are to be demolished to make way for the Orange Line Metro Train project in Lahore, which has already displaced hundreds of people and will lead to the displacement of hundreds of thousands more.

At least 25 heritage sites, including Shalimar Gardens, a world heritage site, will be impacted or destroyed despite being protected by law. In addition, several places of worship and sacred sites are to be demolished including St. Andrews Church, Naulakha Presbyterian Church, Cathedral Church of the Resurrection and the Mominpura Graveyard, which is of particular importance to the Lahore Shi'a community. These properties and sites are protected under the National Antiquities Act 1975.

Local businesses and community amenities along the length of the route are also being destroyed including graveyards, schools, mosques, post offices, hospitals, clinics and green spaces. The Institute for Disadvantaged Children, which served 180 families with mentally handicapped children, was demolished and the families are awaiting relocation to another school.

The Orange Line Metro Train project is due to be completed by October 2017 at an estimated cost of \$1.75 billion. Although the government claims only a few thousand people will be affected, local media and civil society argue that the Punjab government has not factored in the human cost of displacing hundreds of thousands of people living on low rents in densely populated central locations.

Local activists say no compensation has been paid to the majority of those who have been displaced since November 2015 and what little compensation is available has been distributed unfairly, while many of those living on the land in the path of the planned line are being harassed and threatened by police and government officials to relinquish their land and properties.

“As the first United Nations Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights I have stressed the importance of cultural heritage as a human right and essential component of the cultural life of people. I am therefore shocked that the 27 km Orange train project in Lahore threatens at least 27 well known cultural heritage sites – one for every kilometer,” Farida Shaheed, the former UN Special Rapporteur on Cultural Rights said. “People living and working in these areas will have their entire livelihoods and ways of cultural life disrupted. The destruction and harm to these sites violates the right of residents and Pakistanis in general of hugely significant parts of their cultural heritage, which is an essential part of people’s cultural identities. The government must remember and abide by its legal obligations under the international treaties to respect and protect people’s cultural heritage, and uphold the rights of full participation of the concerned people in decision-making about all policies enshrined in these covenants and in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.”

Mervyn Thomas, Chief Executive of Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), said, “CSW is deeply concerned that these communities will lose their homes and livelihoods, while also facing the potential loss of religious heritage sites. This is a blow at a time when religious minorities are in a particularly weak position in Pakistan. It is clear that in the planning and construction of this train line, the Punjab government is in contravention of various legislation regarding cultural heritage, as well as international covenants protecting cultural rights and the right to freedom of religion or belief. We urge the Punjab Government to enter into dialogue with the affected communities in order to ensure that the civil and cultural rights of these citizens are upheld.”