



8.22.16

## PAKISTAN | High Court Moves to Protect Threatened Heritage Sites

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) welcomes the decision by the Lahore High Court on Aug. 19 to uphold a writ petition challenging the construction of the Orange Line Metro Train project, which threatens a number of heritage sites in the city.

The writ petition was filed by a group of civil society activists, including The Cecil & Iris Chaudhry Foundation (CICF), on Dec. 16, 2015. The court ordered construction to be suspended within a 200-foot radius of 11 heritage sites. These include places of worship such as St. Andrews Presbyterian Church and sacred sites such as Baba Mauj Darya Bukhari shrine, which are protected under the Punjab Special Premises (Preservation) Ordinance, 1985 and Antiquity Act, 1975.

Last year, civil society activists warned that the Orange Line Metro train project endangered at least 25 heritage sites. Despite a stay order granted Jan. 28, a two-member commission constituted by the Lahore High Court found in June 2016 that the order had been violated at five of the 11 heritage sites. The violations include the partial demolition of houses within a 200-foot radius of Mauj Darya shrine and sewerage work that was undertaken near Zaibunnisa's Tomb and Lakshmi building.

"This is a win for the city of Lahore! The voice of the people has been heard and justice has been served in regards to protecting the heritage of Lahore. We are extremely pleased with this decision. The judgment upholds Pakistan's heritage laws, Punjab Special Premises (Preservation) Ordinance, it upholds the Constitution of Pakistan 1973 and Pakistan's ratified commitments to the United Nations," Michelle Chaudhry, President of the CICF, said. "As we breathe a sigh of relief we know it is not over yet; the Government of Punjab has announced that they will take this to the next level of justice by appealing in the Supreme Court of Pakistan. However we at The Cecil & Iris Chaudhry Foundation (CICF) are committed to stand by the people, their places of worship, the heritage and the city of Lahore and will not sit back and allow the destruction of this 2,000 year old city, which is our home. We have confidence in the Supreme Court of Pakistan and remain optimistic that the rule of law will prevail."

CSW's Chief Executive, Mervyn Thomas said, "The importance of these heritage sites is not only historic. Some are places of worship for minority faith groups and have added significance

in an environment in which they already feel vulnerable and marginalized. We urge the Punjab government to comply with the High Court judgement, paying heed to the directive to engage independent consultants to work in cooperation with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization to conduct independent impact assessments regarding protected buildings and special premises.”