

EDITOR: Aftab Alexander Mughal

QUARTERLY – January 2024 - Issue 113

AWARD-WINNING magazine

MINORITY CONCERN PAKISTAN

Voice for minority rights and religious freedom

Honorary Advisory Board: Anee Muskan, Brian Gill, Kamran Chaudhary, Mehak Sabir & Prof. Tanveer Chaudhary

E: minorityconcernpk@gmail.com **W:** <http://minorityconcern.wixsite.com/mcpakistan>



Image by: Asqa Kanwal

2023: Year of Mayhem for Pakistani Minorities

Another Tumultuous Year for Minorities

By Aftab Alexander Mughal

Year 2023 was another year of survival for Pakistani minorities, including, Christians, Hindus, Sikhs, and others. Non-Muslims experience persecution, violence, and mayhem, with the hope of a new government to bring relief to their woes after the national general elections in February this year.

Fear grew after the brutal attack of Christians in Jaranwala town in August, where thousands of armed Muslims set fire to at least 24 churches and looted and destroyed hundreds of Christian homes. Thousands of Christians were displaced, and several are yet to rebuild their homes and come back. The attack was the result of blasphemy accusation against two Christian brothers. Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) pointed out the mosque loudspeakers and pulpit were misused against Christians in Jaranwala.

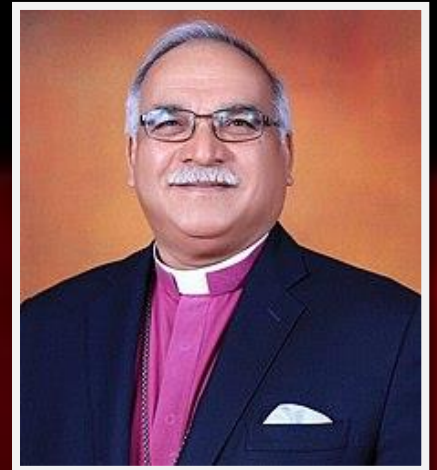
"People are still fearful, and nobody knows what will happen next and when will it happen again. Nothing is safe - their lives, properties, and their churches," said Kiran Afzaal, a Christian lawyer.

The Jaranwala riot was only the latest in a long list of violent incidents targeting the Christians. There were at least 30 major incidents, which include physical attacks on minorities, and kidnapping, raping, and forcibly converting Christian girls, sometimes minor girls, to Islam. False blasphemy allegations and physical attacks are common.

Christian leaders say that in the Muslim-dominated country of 220 million people, political leaders oppose each other to satisfy radical groups and tend to ignore religious minorities, who are less than four percent of the population. They have never been a politically significant community in Islamic Republic of Pakistan. "The administration ignores their complaints, and they live as second-class citizens," said Suneel Malik, a human rights defender.

Violence is growing against Christians as the whole community is punished collectively because of an alleged allegation of blasphemy against any Christian, observed Naeem Yousaf Gill, National Director of National Commission of Justice and Peace (NCJP), a human rights body of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Pakistan. Nadia Hameed advocate reiterated the ongoing issues and said there are many discriminatory laws that give leverage to only one religion – Islam.

Fanatic groups are gaining ground in society and in the administration as well. "Christians face the threat from those fanatic groups," Father Sarfraz Simon told *Minority Concern*. He suggested that promotion of ecumenism and Inter-faith harmony at grassroot level would help to address minority issues.



CHURCH'S CONCERN OVER GOVERNMENT'S STATEMENT

THE moderator of Church of Pakistan Bishop Azad Marshall reacted to the government's statement about the equal rights of minorities in Pakistan.

On 6 October, the caretaker Chief Minister of Punjab Mohsin Naqvi said that minorities enjoy equal rights in Pakistan.

Bishop Marshall issued a statement on X (Twitter) and said that it's unfortunate that while our government leaders repeatedly claim that non-Muslim Pakistanis are equal citizens of the country, these statements become meaningless when we see the government's indifferent attitude towards our legitimate demands for justice and due acknowledgement of our concerns for protection from religiously motivated violence, prejudice, discrimination etc. In Jaranwala we still smell the acid in the air and see the evidence of freshly burnt buildings.

MINORITY CONCERN'S

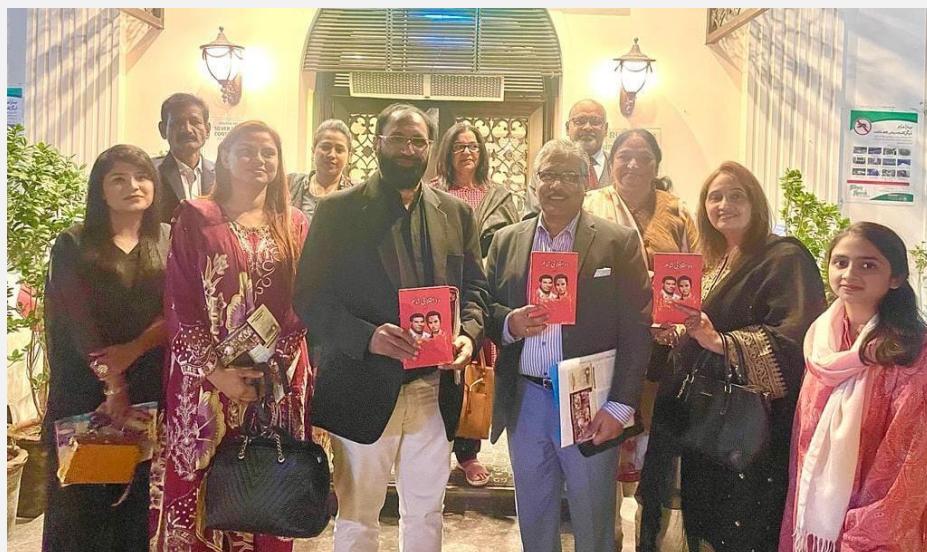
Forthcoming Webinars

January to May 2024

DATE	MODERATOR	TOPIC
6 January	Aqsa Kanwal	Political participation of minorities
20 January	Esther Das	Elections 2024 and Minorities
3 February	Nazia Sardar	Minorities and political landscape
17 February	John Bosco	Interview: Fr. Bonnie Mendes
2 March	Shazia George	Women Day
16 March	Sammer Wafa	Basic human rights of minorities
21 March	Naeem Waiz	Easter's message
6 April	Chris Gill	Religious freedom in South Asia
27 April	Taskeen Khan	Minorities contribution in education
5 May	Shazia Mariam Edwin	Labour Day
25 May	Jeem Phey Ghauri	World Day for Cultural Diversity

Minority Concern's Team Meets

NOVEMBER 2023: Minority Concern's team members and well-wishers met in Faisalabad and Lahore to discuss future activities.



During the meeting in Faisalabad, the launch of 'Do Inqlabi Shair' (a Punjabi poetry book) was held. Safia Hayat, a famous poet, translated the poetry of two famous poets. The book is a great read.



Programme For Prosperity

A six-month Khushhali Fellowship Programme is aimed at educating and empowering the children of sanitation workers. The idea is to help them break the cycle of generational poverty arising from their parents' occupation. The fellowship programme is called *Sweepers are Superheroes*.

Candidates with a minimum education level of matriculation and aged between 16 and 24 have been enrolled. They were selected from across Lahore.

In November, the Centre for Law and Justice initiated the programme in partnership with the British Council, Lancaster University, UK, and Forman Christian College University, for the daughters of sanitation workers, a disadvantaged community. (Umaima Ahmed, TNS, 24 Dec.)

Section 298-A Changed In 2023

THE government strengthened the blasphemy laws more as the punishment of Section 298-A of Pakistan Penal Code was changed from three years to 10 years. The law was passed by the National Assembly (lower house of the parliament) and the Senate (upper house of the parliament). To become a law, the bill is waiting for the President's signature.

CHRISTMAS IN PAKISTAN



On Christmas Day: Fr. Bonnie Mendes celebrates late afternoon Mass at Sts. Peter and Paul Cathedral in Faisalabad.

Christians Celebrated Christmas Regardless of Economic Stress and Physical Danger



Although life is not easy for Pakistani Christians, they celebrated Christmas with religious zeal despite facing economic pressure and physical threats

after the Jaranwala attack on Christian localities. Like many other Christians, Adeel Masih was worried about feeding his family of four while the future was uncertain, and less hope was on the horizon. "Everything is expensive while the income is low," he told *Minority Concern (MC)*. He took out a loan to celebrate Christmas.

Masih lives in Warispura, a Christian dominated neighbourhood in Faisalabad. About 100,000 Christians live in the locality. The majority are poor and do menial work, Manzoor Anthony told *MC*.



Despite worrying about her job Humera Zafar celebrated Christmas. She works as a polio worker and her supervisor Mohammad Ajmal told her that her job was ending in January. He threatened with yet another Jaranwala-type incident if

she protested the decision. (Images by: Manzoor Stephen)

PM MESSAGE

Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaarul Haq Kakar felicitated the Christian community on Christmas and said the nation on this day should pledge to make Pakistan a model of religious tolerance and inter-faith harmony, *APP* reported.

"The Christian community is celebrating Christmas in Pakistan and across the world and I and the whole nation felicitate the Christian brothers and sisters on the happy occasion of Christmas. Christmas is the name of love, brotherhood, patience, and sacrifice." These values were critical in putting a society on the path of development, he added.



Christians in Lahore – SAMMA TV



MINORITY CONCERN

PAKISTAN NATIONAL ELECTIONS 2024 & MINORITIES

CHARTER OF DEMANDS

Pakistan is holding general elections in February this year. Religious minorities, including Christians and Hindus, present their 'Charter of Demands' to the political parties and the future government to create a true democratic state where non-Muslim citizens are given equal rights without any discrimination.

1. Minority rights should get significant space in the political process and the governance system of Pakistan.
2. Political parties take concrete measures to make Pakistan a pluralistic state by putting Qaude-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah's speech in the parliament.
3. Implementation of the judgment (SMC No. 1/2014), given by the former Chief Justice of Pakistan Justice (Retd.) Tasaduq Hussain Jilani on 19 June 2014 on minority rights.
4. Minorities should have an effective presence in decision-making bodies, especially for the nomination of non-Muslim's reserved seats, which should be representative, merit-based, and transparent.
5. Political Parties must give tickets to non-Muslim candidates where they can win in an open election on general seats from their respective parties.
6. The government, the Election Commission of Pakistan, and political parties, especially the candidates, must make sure that hate speech against non-Muslims should not be used or condoned. Therefore, minorities should actively take part in the elections of the country.
7. Political parties should table necessary bills in the federal and provincial assemblies for protection & development of Pakistan's non-Muslim citizens.
8. The 'Ministry of Minorities' should be restored, and through a consultative process, 'National Commission for Minorities' should be formed.
9. Political parties should give special attention to the major minority issues, such as discriminatory laws, which are contrary to the international human rights treaties, protection of minorities, the issue of their development, abduction and forced marriages of non-Muslim girls, and the just implementation of jobs' quota system.
10. Lands should be given to Churches and Temples, just like lands are given to Muslims. (IMAGE: Notify Pakistan)

Aftab Alexander Mughal, Director, Minority Concern

GENERAL ELECTIONS 2024



General Elections & Minority Aspirations: Archbishop Joseph Arshad

The Christian community has demanded an increase in minority representation. Archbishop Dr. Joseph Arshad of Islamabad-Rawalpindi said that minority aspirations should also be considered in general elections. In a statement, issued on 27

October, Archbishop Arshad said that holding of general elections in Pakistan is an important process for the promotion of democracy.

(Brian Gill for Catholics in Pakistan)



Christians In Danger Due To Growing Intolerance: Bishop Said

Bishop Samson Shukardin of Hyderabad, newly elected the president of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Pakistan, spoke *Asia News* regarding his priorities.

He told *Asia News* on 17 November that Among the primary challenges is that of limiting - or countering - abuses linked to blasphemy laws, often used to settle personal disputes, or attack other people with false accusations. A phenomenon that does not only concern Christians but is present in many sectors of Pakistani society and which ends up affecting the weakest fringes of the population.

Another unresolved and urgent issue is that of girls - often minors - kidnapped and forcibly converted to other religions, most often at the hands of the majority in Pakistan. "We must ask state institutions, states the prelate, to take these cases very seriously, to bring the guilty behind bars and to give justice to the families and girls who are victims. Only with the help of government institutions can we resolve these problems."

Minority Candidate from Buner



Dr Saveera Parkash, 25-year-old Hindu candidate is going to contest for the general provincial seat PK-25 from Buner, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, for Pakistan People's Party, *TFT* reported on 29 December.

According to the Election Commission's data, a total of 28,626 nomination papers have been received for the 2024 elections, with 3,139 from women. For the National Assembly, 7,716 candidates submitted papers, with 93.8% men and 6.2% women. Similarly, 18,546 candidates submitted papers for provincial assembly seats, with 95.6% men and 4.4% women. A total of 1,824 women submitted papers for seats reserved for women in the national and provincial assemblies, and 543 people submitted papers for reserved seats for non-Muslims, *TFT* reported.

Ahmadiyya Community Denies Voting Right

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH (8 December): As Pakistan prepares for nationwide parliamentary elections in February 2024, one religious group remains largely disenfranchised. Discriminatory provisions in Pakistan's electoral law effectively exclude members of the Ahmadiyyah community because of their religious beliefs.

To register as voters, Ahmadis must either renounce their faith or agree to be placed in a separate electoral list that categorizes them as "non-Muslim." Self-identification as Muslims, however, is a cornerstone of Ahmadiyya religious belief. Because of this, Ahmadis, who number more than 500,000 in Pakistan, have in practice, been denied the right to vote in local, provincial, and national elections.

In 2002, Pakistan abolished an electoral system in which Muslims and non-Muslims registered and voted in separate categories. The government also created a separate category for Ahmadis.



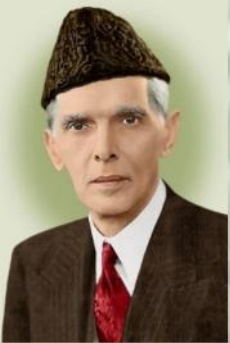
International

CAMPAIGN

Religious Minorities of Pakistan Urge For A

Pluralistic Pakistan

EQUAL RIGHTS FOR MINORITIES



Founder of Pakistan, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah's speech on 11 August 1947 should be the foundation of Pakistan's political process & the governance system.

- The speech should be displayed in the parliament.
- It should be added in the Constitution as a preamble.
- It should be added in the school and college syllabus.

**MINORITY
CONCERN**

CAMPAIGN WILL BE LAUNCHED ON

10 December 2024 in London

ATTACK OF JARANWALA

Targeted Attack on Christians, Senate Learnt

13 OCTOBER: the Senate Standing Committee on Human Rights



learnt that on 16 August 2023, a deliberate act intended to malign a local resident through the wrongful placement of blasphemous material near his home had triggered a devastating ripple effect, *Dawn* reported. The incident is revealed to have stemmed from personal enmity and evolved into an egregious case of using blasphemy laws to target individuals. The meeting was informed that as a preventive measure, around 57 'Meesaq' centres had been opened across Punjab districts to foster interfaith harmony and safeguard minority rights, the newspaper said.

Partnerships with the chamber of commerce were also being established to secure employment opportunities for the affected Christian community.

IMRF Delegation Meeting with CPO



IMRF's meeting with CPO regarding Jaharawala case.

Christmas Fair for THE VICTIMS OF JARANWALA



On 20 December, a Christian organisation, CICF, organised a Christmas fair for the victims of Jaranwala. The objective was to restore faith, hope, and trust of the fearful Christians of the area.

Six Months On, Christians Still Living Under Fear

PEOPLE are still in shock and living under fear.

Muslim mobs attacked Christian localities and churches when two Christian brothers - Raja Umar and Rocky Masih -- were accused of committing blasphemy.

The Jaranwala riot was only the latest in a long list of violent incidents targeting the Christians. Twenty-six (26) Churches (eight in the town) in Jaranwala town and in surrounding villages were vandalised and more than 80 houses were burned. Some 500 Christian families have fled their homes following the attack.

Jaranwala in Faisalabad district of Punjab is home to about 5,000 Christians, most of them poor and low-paid sanitation workers, according to *UCA News*. About 70 percent of churches have been completely destroyed and nearly half of the Christian houses remained damaged. The damage in material terms can be gauged from the aid worth eight million rupees (US\$28,394).

Christian Briefed on JIT Progress

SSP Investigation retired Capt. Muhammad Ajmal held a meeting with a Christian leader regarding the Jaranwala joint investigation team (JIT) at the Police Lines Complex on 13 October, *Dawn* reported. Christian leaders were represented by Fr Khalid Rashid Aasi. The SSP investigation assured Christians that their concerns would be addressed by the JIT.

BLASPHEMEY CASES

215 People Behind Bar

The Senate Standing Committee on Human Rights was informed on 13 October that 215 individuals had been arrested under blasphemy charges while 17 had been sentenced, *Dawn* reported.

COMMITTEE FOR MINORITIES: The committee had adopted a recommendation to constitute a national coordination committee within the Ministry of Human Rights to draft standard operating procedures for “effective control on issues that cause suffering to minorities”.

MISUSE OF LAW: Senator Iqbal voiced concerns about the exploitation of blasphemy laws for “settling personal scores.” NCHR Chairperson Rabiya Javeri Agha highlighted were currently. He stated that the committee would also investigate ways to prevent the misuse of laws, adding that Senator Sherry Rehman would be invited to discuss ways to prevent the misuse of laws. He noted that a bill previously introduced by the PPP senator on blasphemy laws would also be examined, the newspaper said.

INTOLERANCE: Senator Walid Iqbal emphasised the need to counter society’s growing intolerance by incorporating teachings of the country’s founding fathers regarding interfaith harmony into the education system, according to *Dawn*.

HRCP on Sargodha Blasphemy Cases

In a fact-finding report over the occurrence of blasphemy cases in Sargodha district, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) pointed out the misuse of mosque loudspeakers and pulpit to press for FIRs against the Christian community and instigate violence against them. The HRCP fact-finding mission report titled, ‘*Mob violence and the social ostracization of the Christian community in Sargodha*’ released on 6 October, *Dawn* reported.

Report of USCIRF On Pakistan’s Blasphemy Law

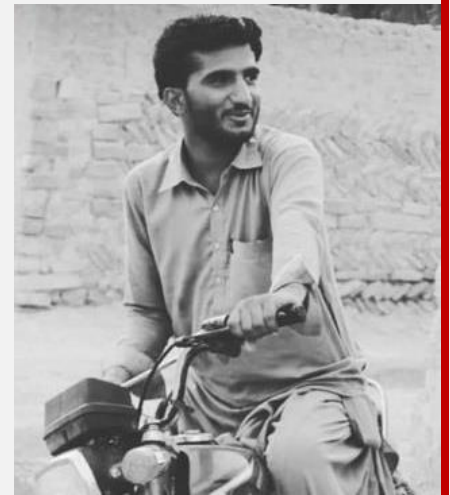
ON 18 DECEMBER, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) released a report on *Assessing Blasphemy in Pakistan*, which describes the increasing use of Pakistan’s blasphemy law in 2023 to target individuals based on religion or belief. According to the report, more than 2,100 people have been accused of blasphemy in Pakistan since 1987, with 40 currently on death row and at least 89 killed by mobs for blasphemy.

Highest Number of Blasphemy Cases Were Reported During Imran Khan’s Tenure: PAKISTANI JOURNALIST

According to a study by a Pakistan journalist, the highest number of blasphemy cases were reported during former prime minister Imran Khan’s 4-year tenure. “It was mainly because of his policy of Talibanization and support to Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) who registered a number of blasphemy cases,” the journalist told *Minority Concern*. According to the *Atlantic Council*, TLP: an emerging right-wing threat to Pakistan’s democracy. (The full report - <https://www.dawn.com/news/1773628/in-the-face-of-increasing-misuse-lawmakers-double-down-on-stricter-blasphemy-legislation>).

Blasphemy Accused Killed

Abdul Rauf, a Muslim man from the district Turbat, Balochistan



province, was killed by unknown people. According to Sameer Ajmal, a Christian journalist, Rauf was a teacher at a private school. He was accused of blasphemy by some students. He was going to a Jirga prove his innocence.

19 Children Arrested for Blasphemy

Nineteen children were arrested on charges of blasphemy from across Punjab between January 1, 2023, and October 16, 2023. According to data available with The News, 6 out of these 19 children are in prison charged with blasphemy while the others were acquitted, *The News* reported on 1 December.

Sarmad Ali, Inspectorate General of Punjab Prisons, explained that numerous children across Pakistan are facing penal charges that carry severe punishment.

Ali said that some of these children are not allowed to establish their juvenility under Section 8 of the Juvenile Justice System Act 2018.

Experts Urge Govt. to Strengthen Legal Safeguards to Implement Religious Freedom

LAHORE: A panel discussion on the theme “The Scope of Article 20 and the Constitution of Pakistan and Practices” noted that textbooks developed under single national curriculum of subjects: English, Urdu, and Social Science carry religious content,

which should not be taught to religious minorities as guaranteed in Article 22(1) of the constitution of Pakistan.

Peter Jacob, the executive director of CSJ spoke about the Article 20 of the Constitution of Pakistan and its intersection with Article 18 of the international instruments; UDHR and ICCPR.

Man Sentenced Over Blasphemy Charges

A local court in Lahore on 11 October sentenced a Muslim man to life in prison for desecrating the Holy Quran. The sessions court, however, declared that the accused could file an appeal against the sentence within 30 days, *TFT* reported. He was arrested on 10 June 22.



HOIER THAN THOU

Clerics and elders forced a professor to sign an unusual apology.

IN October, a video surfaced from Bannu district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, in which a professor is seen apologising in writing in the presence of several clerics, tribal *malikan* and the district administration.

The story has a backdrop. A few months ago, clerics and local *malikan* had barred women from leaving their homes and going out. The ban was indiscriminate. It did not even spare women who needed to go out to receive their stipends under the Benazir Income Support Programme. In response to this ban, a seminar was held in the Domel tehsil on women’s rights in Islam and the constitution. A teacher of biology at a local college, Sher Ali, was the main guest and spoke about women’s rights, equality, and protection. Citing Articles 25 and 26 of the

constitution, he called the ban on women going out in Bannu ‘unconstitutional.’

A few days after the seminar, Sher Ali and his family had to face severe difficulties after several mullahs issued a *fatwa* against him resulting in a social boycott of the family.

When the situation became tense, some elders and members of the district administration intervened to persuade Sher Ali to apologise and end the matter. Thus, in the presence of more than 60 clerics, area *malikan* and district administration, Sher Ali apologised under oath. (*TNS*, 29 October 2023)

Uniform Marriage Age

ISLAMABAD: National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) Chairperson Nilofar Bakhtiar said on 11 October that there should be a uniform minimum age for girls’ marriages across the country and practitioners of all religions should comply with it.

“I suggest that the minimum age for girl marriage should be 18 in Pakistan but in Punjab and some other provinces minimum age is 16. The minimum age in Christian and Parsi religions is different.

Eleven Significant Attacks on Christians: NCHR

The National Commission on Human Rights (NCHR), Jaranwala marked the eleventh significant episode since 1997 involving the persecution of the Christian community, *Dawn* reported on 13 October.

FORCED CONVERSION

STOP FORCED CONVERSIONS: DEEPAK PERWANI ADDRESSES 'DARK REALITY THAT PAKISTAN NEEDS TO CHANGE'



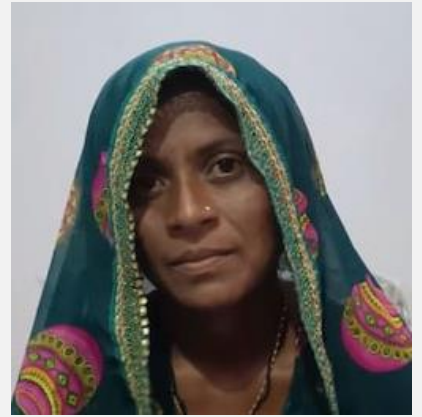
Fashion designer Deepak Perwani, a prominent figure in Pakistan's fashion industry, recently took a bold stance on the pervasive issue of forced conversions within the country. Using his social media platform, Perwani spoke out against this concerning practice, particularly highlighting the plight of Hindu girls who are often forced to convert to Islam to marry Muslim men, *Express Tribune* reported on 21 December.

In a compelling post on X, Perwani drew attention to the alarming trend of Hindu girls being coerced into conversion for marriage while pointing out the lack of reciprocal conversions, emphasising the inherent imbalance and injustice in such situations. He criticised the prevailing situation in Pakistan, calling for an end to forced conversions and condemning the apparent inaction of the responsible authorities in addressing this crucial issue.

"So only Hindu girls want to convert to marry Muslims in Pakistan and no Muslim girl ever converts to marry a Hindu in Pakistan?" queried the designer. "Stop forced conversions. It's a dark reality that Pakistan needs to change if it wants to move forward." He further used the hashtag 'HRCP,' alongside the phrase 'shame on,' implying his dismay with the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP).

Being a member of the Hindu Sindhi community in Pakistan, Perwani's impassioned plea comes at a potential personal risk due to the sensitive nature of the subject. Nevertheless, the designer, known for his significant influence and outspokenness on social issues, opted to raise his voice against the prevalent forced conversions, despite the potential backlash, the newspaper reported.

Hindu Woman Kidnapped



Rajeeta Meghwar Kolhi was kidnapped, converted, and forced into a marriage. She fled from captivity after two months but a court, despite her pleas to be with her parents, sent her to a women's shelter, reported by *IT* on 3 October.

Christian Girl Kidnapped

Samreen Aftab, a Christian minor, was abducted, forcibly converted, and forced to marry her captor, Muhammad Amir earlier this year. On 28 October, her father filed a petition for justice in Lahore High Court. (*Asia News*)

HINDU GIRL ABDUCTOR



Chanda, 14 years old, was abducted in Hyderabad. Sorath Sindhu reportedly mentioned in social media that she was first sent to Darulaman and later sent off with her abductor. Chanda's mother asks for mercy.

AHMADIS UNDER ATTACK



Worship Place Attacked in AJK

A mob of around 40 people attacked an Ahmadiyya place of worship in Azad Jammu and Kashmir on 24 November, *TFT* reported.

Worship Place Desecrated in Faisalabad



Police and the local administration oversaw the desecration of an Ahmadiyya place of worship in Faisalabad, the community claimed on 22 December, *TFT* reported.

The community said that the Ahmadiyya place of worship was targeted in the middle of the night and had been constructed in 1956. It had been receiving threats from extremists since last year, however, the authorities had managed to keep the situation under control. That changed on the night between Thursday and Friday when police and local administration oversaw its desecration.

The Ahmadiyya community said that this was the 42nd incident where an Ahmadiyya place of worship had been desecrated in the calendar year 2023.

Graves Desecrated



The Ahmadiyya community claimed that unidentified people in Kasur had desecrated two graves of community members, *TFT* reported on 1 October 2023.

The community, in a post, said that the tombstones of the deceased community members were destroyed in the Bulhair area of Kasur District. The community said it is facing a fresh and aggressive wave of hatred and violence, with the Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) orchestrating many attacks.

Recently, the TLP, a hardliner organisation, staged a rally ahead of Rabiul Awwal 12 in Daska, Sialkot, where they threatened to attack an Ahmadi place of worship that had been built by a partition hero and Pakistan's first foreign minister Sir Zafarullah Khan.

While the police and local administration prevented that, they did desecrate a graveyard in the same area, desecrating the epitaphs of some 70 graves.

Vigilante Attacks

Since 1984, some 4,000 Ahmadis have faced criminal charges because of their faith, according to a tally kept by the community, including 334 under blasphemy laws which can carry the death penalty, *France 24* reported on 5 October.

Interfaith Conference in Multan



MULTAN: Bishop Yousaf Sohan of Multan is chairing the conference while a number of Muslim religious leaders addressed the event.

Interfaith Discussion on TV



Fr. Sarfraz Simon from the Catholic Archdiocese of Islamabad-Rawalpindi is speaking during a TV discussion of interfaith harmony.

Meeting with Pakistani Ambassador



ROME: The delegation of Voice for Justice Pakistan met with the Pakistan ambassador at the Embassy of Pakistan in Italy regarding violence against Christians in Jaranwala.

Christian Minor Girls Abducted, Gang Raped, and Forced Converted

(Joseph Jenson from Jubilee Campaign) - 15-year-old Christian girl Mishal Rasheed was abducted, sexually assaulted, forcibly converted to Islam, and coerced into marriage with her abductor, Abdul Sattar.

Mishal's ordeal began on 25 October 2022, when assailants forcibly entered her home, leaving her father beaten unconscious, and abducted her at gunpoint.

She suffered a horrific gang rape four Muslim men and endured six agonizing months in captivity, despite her family's desperate attempts to seek help.

On 19 October 2023, Jubilee Campaign submitted a writ petition to the High Court of Lahore, urging action against the accused.

Pakistani Christian Teacher Wins Global Teacher Prize



A Pakistani teacher who as a teenager founded a school for underprivileged children in her home has won the \$1 million Global Teacher Prize.

According to *The National News*, Sister Zeph was just 13 years old when she set up a school in the courtyard of her home for children whose parents could not afford to send them to school. She also wants to create a shelter for orphans. (Image: WKU Public Radio)

Remembering Lost Lives

Seven (Christian) workers of Idara-i-Amn-o-Insaf were killed in a terrorist attack on 25 September 2002

Almost three decades, a team of Christian and Muslims workers at the Idara-i-Amn-o-Insaf did their best to help the disadvantaged in Karachi, one of the world's most populous cities. They worked from a small office in the Rimpa Plaza in the bustling heart of city. The voices for their noble mission were forever silenced when tragedy struck on 25 September 2002. Seven dedicated workers, all devout Christians, fell victim to a horrifying act of terrorism at the charity's office. The organisation never recovered from this devastating strike.

Robin Sharif, one of the survivors of the brutal attack, is still haunted by the memories of the fateful morning. Sharif vividly recalls how a group of armed men barged into their office and took everyone hostage. "They shot everyone once in the head at point-blank range. I was plain lucky to survive," Sharif said in an interview.

The seven staff members who died at the office were identified as Aslam Martin, Mushtaq Roshan, John Maneses, Kamran Anjum, Iqbal Allah Rakha, Benjamin Talib and Edwin Foster.

Established in 1972 as a collaborative effort between the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Karachi and the Church of Pakistan, a Protestant denomination, Idara-i-Amn-o-Insaf (or Committee for Peace and Justice) was formed with the financial assistance of the World Council of Churches, a worldwide organisation founded to bring together Catholics and Protestants. The organisation's establishment was inspired by liberation theology, a movement that grew out of South America as a response to poverty and the ill-treatment meted out to ordinary people.

"Idara-i-Amn-o-Insaf's cause was a call for social justice, with a particular focus on advocating for the basic employment rights of the impoverished and marginalised Christians and Muslims. It supported several development projects in Pakistan," says Zafar Iqbal, who was the acting director of the Idara-i-Amn-o-Insaf at the time of the incident. Iqbal says that the IAI was one of the first non-government organisations in Pakistan.

Zahid Farooq, an activist associated with the Urban Resource Centre, says that the main objective of setting up the organisation was to reduce the burden of the churches to help the Christians migrating from the Punjab in the 1970s and to organise them at their workplaces and localities where they lived. "The Idara-i-Amn-o-Insaf made efforts to include a box for religion in the national identity cards. It also campaigned for a joint electorate system and amendments to the country's blasphemy laws," Farooq says.

The organisation also published an Urdu-language magazine, *Jafakash*, highlighting the issues of industrial workers and advocating human rights. Its editors included Ahmed Saleem, Rahim Baskh Azad Abdul Rehman Naqqash and Tauqeer Chughtai. "*Jafakash* was one of the few publications extensively covering trade

unions and labour issues, particularly bonded labour, across the country," Chughtai, the last editor of the magazine, told *TNS*.

There was a significant surge in violence against Christians in Pakistan following the United States' post-9/11 military campaign in Afghanistan. This period marked a troubling shift, characterised by a sharp rise in attacks on Christian churches and philanthropic institutions.

More than five years and six months after the attack, Crime Investigation Department (later renamed the Counter Terrorism Department) of the Sindh Police announced that Mohammed Wajahat Khan, who had orchestrated the attack on Idara-i-Amn-o-Insaf's office, had surrendered to a law enforcement agency in Lahore. During interrogation by the CID, Khan revealed that he had been a part of Harkat-ul Ansar, a group earlier focusing on Indian-administered Kashmir and Afghanistan. He said he had received weapons and combat training in Afghanistan in 1995.

Khan and his group of 18 militants killed Aven Adven, the head of Idara-i-Aman-o-Insaf in May 2022, at his car spares shop near Tibet Centre.

About the Idara-i-Amn-o-Insaf, Khan said he believed that the NGO had been working against the blasphemy law, which he found "unacceptable".

In January 2001, police had arrested several activists, including Father Arnold Heredia and Aslam Martin of the IAI, when more than 300 protestors tried to march to the Governor's House to submit a memorandum demanding an end to misuse of blasphemy laws. (*Zia Ur Rehman, TNS, 1 October 2023*)



News, Reports Press Releases & Statements

**They will be published on our
WEBSITE & MAGAZINE**

- NEWS should be sent on the same day the incident or event occurs.
- LATE news is no news, so please send your news quickly.
- IT should be just one page - A4 size.
- A photo should be sent, and its source should be mentioned.
- PLEASE mention: WHEN & WHERE the incident or the event happened.
- FULL names should be used with designations.
- MINORITY CONCERN has rights to edit the news, pictures or any content.
- MINORITY CONCERN reserves the right to either publish or not.
- PLEASE send your news via email
- NEWS can be sent in English or Urdu.

CONTACT

E: minorityconcernpk@gmail.com

W: <http://minorityconcern.wixsite.com/mcpakistan>