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The Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to the United Nations Office and other International Organizations in Geneva presents its compliments to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), and with reference to latter's joint communication No. AL PAK 3/2024 dated 30 September 2024, has the honour to attach the response of the Government of Pakistan.

The Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the assurances of its highest consideration.



Geneva, 12 November 2024

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)
Palais Des Nations
1211 Geneva 10

Permanent Mission of Pakistan to the UN
Geneva

Response to the Joint Communication from Special Procedures

The freedom of religion is enshrined in the Articles 20, 21 and 22 of Pakistan's Constitution, alongside guarantees of non-discrimination on the basis of religion and other grounds. Moreover, the so-called "blasphemy" provisions in the penal code referred to in the letter are aimed at maintaining harmony in a diverse society, and are not targeted at religious minorities. In fact, Muslims make up almost the entirety of persons accused with and convicted on such grounds under the law.

In addition, there are extensive safeguards in applying the provisions criminalising religious offences to ensure the safety of the accused, prevent their misuse, and to pre-empt possible mob violence. Meanwhile, legal safeguards and remedies are in place to maintain a high standard for the burden of proof and guard against frivolous or false charges and fake evidence. These are complemented by strict procedural requirements.

As elsewhere in the world, Pakistan is also experiencing increasing hate speech, the dissemination and impact of which is amplified by misuse of social media. In responding to this unfortunate phenomenon, the Government of Pakistan has adopted a multi-faceted approach of which criminalising incitement remains an important pillar.

The Government and society at large have clearly and vocally spoken out against violence on the basis of religion or belief.

Moreover, the authorities have moved swiftly to minimise possible harm and damage, provide compensation, and initiate legal proceedings against the perpetrators. Police and law-enforcement presence is being consistently enhanced in areas where minority communities reside to ensure their safety.

The Government's response to incidents has proceeded in tandem with efforts to address the root causes and drivers.

The Government has constituted a Task Force to develop a Strategy for Religious Tolerance. Interfaith harmony committees at the district level are engaged in maintaining dialogue and contact, minimising potential areas of tension between members of different religious communities. Special prosecution units have also been established at the district level to prosecute acts of violence against minorities and underscore the Government's resolve to ensure accountability.

The provincial government has established '*Messaq Centres*' in all districts of the province for protection of minorities and promotion of interfaith harmony. These centres directly address problems faced by minorities including resolution of their disputes or cases of their discrimination or delay in justice.

- i) The arson attacks on Churches in Jaranwala in August 2023 saw immediate condemnation from the highest echelons of Government, including the Prime Minister. In the immediate aftermath, senior officials including the Supreme Court Chief Justice, and Muslim religious leaders visited the affected communities to underscore sympathy and solidarity with the victims. The police

presence in Jaranwala was strengthened by 3,000 personnel to ensure the situation did not relapse or recur.

The Police launched 22 criminal investigations – for each of the Churches damaged during the incident – and formed 10 Joint Investigation Teams bringing in expertise from forensics, intelligence and the National Database Registration Authority (NADRA) to cope with the scale of the investigation. Nearly 300 arrests were made of whom 220 are still on judicial or physical remand, including the man accused of making announcements from the Mosque.

All damaged Churches were renovated by the Government and provided with furniture, fixtures, security cameras and ventilation.

In addition, around 80 households were given compensation of Rs. 2.0 million each by the provincial government.

The police in Jaranwala also established common WhatsApp group with the Christian community for a direct contact and to address any threat of violence at the shortest possible time. In addition, the police held regular meetings with the Christian community leaders and has also included diverse segments of all society in collective efforts to promote a sense of peace and harmony including lawyers associations and chambers of commerce. There is an extra deployment of police officials during Sunday services.

- ii) Mob violence in the case of late Mr. Nazir Masih was also condemned. In June 2024, the Senate and National Assembly adopted resolutions underscoring the inviolability of the right to life as the most cherished of fundamental freedoms enshrined in Pakistan's Constitution, and calling on the government to ensure the safety and security of all, especially religious minorities.

They also demanded the provincial governments to investigate the incidents and hold the perpetrators to account.

A high-level investigation was undertaken under the direction of Chief Minister of the Punjab Province.

Thus far, a total of 64 suspects have been arrested in connection with the incident and legal proceedings are underway.

Concurrently, the local administration undertook repair works of houses damaged during the incident while security measures were stepped up for religious minorities' communities and places of worship throughout the province.

From speaking out at the highest levels in Parliament to the 10 police officers injured while rescuing Mr. Masih and his family, Pakistan's commitment to protecting the victims and upholding their rights remains unwavering.

We hope the information above would help clarify the cases raised in the Joint Communication.
