

**Status of Minorities in Pakistan in 2010  
Annual Report  
SAHR<sup>1</sup>**

**Submitted by  
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## Introduction

The traditional threats and discrimination faced by members of the minority and vulnerable communities in Pakistan have steadily aggravated in the last few years in conjunction with militancy, growing intolerance and the occupation of Pakistan by violent extremists. That has left these communities feeling acutely threatened by the growing violence and hate directed against them. The factors for a rise in excesses against these communities include not only the advance of militants and religious extremist elements but also the government's failure to take effective steps to protect the basic human rights of members of minority and vulnerable communities.

There were few positive developments in Pakistan in the year 2010 with regard to the freedom of minorities and all indications suggested that there will be even worse times ahead. Rhetoric about empowerment and protection of religious minorities in the country abounded but little was done in practical terms to achieve that. Efforts for fostering inter-faith harmony, tolerance and peaceful coexistence did not seem to be a priority.

Members of minority communities were targeted in horrific acts of violence on account of their faith. The violence and intimidation was added to a sense of growing insecurity among members of minority communities across the country. As many as 99 Ahmedis were killed across the country on account of faith-based violence during the year. Impunity for perpetrators of violence against minority communities continued. Little progress was made in bringing to justice those involved in violence and arson which was targeted at an entire Christian locality in Gojra, Punjab in 2009.

The year had begun with the government indicating its intent to reform the blasphemy law to prevent its abuse. However, by the end of 2010 any change in the controversial law seemed more remote than ever. The list of victims of the blasphemy law continued to grow. In 2010, at least 64 people were charged under the blasphemy law. Many of these individuals remained in prison. Three men accused of blasphemy were killed in police custody although the charges against them were yet to be proved.

Vigilantes and radical elements continued to treat this as fair game of anyone accused of blasphemy, or anyone voicing support for such accused. In addition to often not doing enough to protect minorities from attacks, the police have also been accused of harassing or being complicit in framing false charges against members of religious minorities. Prejudices among law enforcement personnel were also believed to be a hurdle in effective protection of religious minorities in serious danger from the Taliban and sectarian militant groups.

Extremist views grew more vociferous as voices endorsing basic human rights and tolerance became more isolated and muted in the face of violence and intimidation. Legal discrimination against religious minorities and the government's failure to address religious persecution by Islamist groups enabled atrocities against religious groups who were vulnerable on account of their beliefs.

Investigation and prosecution over campaigns of intimidation and violence against minority groups was not a priority. Charges were seldom brought against those responsible for violence, intimidation and discrimination. Amidst the internal displacement crisis caused by the floods in the summer of 2010 instances of faith-based discrimination against religious minorities were also reported.

There was a growing feeling of a lack of effective representation in parliament for non-Muslim citizens under the joint electorate system, as well as little possibility of holding to account lawmakers nominated to seats reserved for minorities.

## **Freedom of religion**

### *Ahmedis*

The hate speech, intimidation and violence against the Ahmedis, which has been the norm in Pakistan, grew alarmingly in the year under review. Since the promulgation of the 1984 Prohibition of Qadiyaniat Ordinance<sup>2</sup> until the end of the year 2010, as many as 202 Ahmedis had been killed in faith-based attacks. 2010 was the worst year in terms of the number of killings since 1984. As many as 99 Ahmedis were killed in 2010, 92 of them in the Punjab province, four in Sindh, and three in Kyber Pakhtunkhwa (all of them in Mardan district). The attacks that took the highest toll on human lives occurred in Lahore, Punjab, on May 28. On that day terrorists killed 86 Ahmedis in attacks on two Ahmedi congregations in Lahore. 124 Ahmedis were also injured in the two attacks, which were claimed by the Taliban.

Cases were registered against 67 Ahmedis during the year on account of their religious beliefs. Leaders of radical religious political parties kept calling for social boycott of Ahmedis. In his Friday sermon, the head of one religious political party threatened a fresh movement against the Ahmedi community if it 'did not accept their minority status' and the government kept silent about 'their blasphemous and unconstitutional activities'.

Monitoring of mainstream Urdu newspaper during the year found 1,468 news, articles and editorials that promoted hate, intolerance or discrimination against the Ahmedis. Hate campaigns against the Ahmedi community also continued across the country through the use of stickers, wall chalking and distribution of pamphlets.

A worship place constructed in 1982 by an Ahmedi man on his own land in district Chiniot was handed over to the Muslim community after a local prayer leader claimed that the worship place belonged to Muslims. In September, in Khanewal district of Punjab reports emerged that an anti-Ahmedi group had been throwing stones at an

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<sup>2</sup> where two sections of Pakistan Penal code were amended and they were prohibited from use of word, "masjid" (mosque) and reciting Azan and building minarets

Ahmedi worship place for many days. In Toba Take Singh district of Punjab, the local police erased *Kalma* written on an outer wall of an Ahmedi worship place in October.

Yasir Ayaz, an Ahmedi student in Lahore, was denied admission in MSC Zoology in a state-run college because of his faith. In September, Farrukh Shah, an Ahmedi educationist running a school in Ichhra locality of Lahore received a threatening phone call accusing him of preaching his faith to the students at his school. Stickers bearing threatening slogans were pasted on the walls and doors of Ahmedis' houses in Gulgasht Colony, Multan, in January.

### *Christians*

Several instances of discrimination and violence against the Christian community came to light during the year. In the most outrageous acts of violence, in the Faisalabad district, two Christian brothers, Sajid and Rashid Emmanuel, who had been accused of blasphemy were shot dead in police custody on court premises on July 19. All the attackers managed to escape after the attack. The two men had been sent death threats on account of unproven charges of blasphemy. Muslims and Christians clashed for hours in Warispura and Dawoodnagar neighbourhoods of Faisalabad after the two brothers' murder. As seen in the Gojra attacks of 2009, no action was taken to prevent the abuse of mosque loudspeakers which were used after the killings to instigate attacks on the Christian community. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) commenting on the killing, said, "It is obvious that the mere charge of blasphemy, however preposterous it may be, is now a conviction in itself." A case was registered against a superintendent of police (SP) and a deputy superintendent of police (DSP) for ignoring directives about provision of security to the two brothers. In the aftermath of the killing, minority members of the Punjab Assembly demanded a review of the blasphemy law which they said was 'being used to victimise minorities on the basis of false allegations'.

More than a year after the horrific anti-Christian violence in Gojra, not one person had been found guilty of the murders and torching of houses in arson attacks that had led to the death of eight Christians. An HRCP fact-finding team that visited Gojra in July, ahead of the first anniversary of the grisly attacks the previous year, found that the area was peaceful but largely so on account of the presence of a strong police contingent. Little had been done to secure inter-faith harmony on durable basis and to reassure the Christian community. However, most of the torched houses and a destroyed church had been reconstructed. Police had submitted *Challan* (case file) for trial of the accused, but there was no indication of when the proceeding would begin. The fact-finding team learned that the witnesses in the case were under great pressure and might not appear in court if the trial was delayed further or if their security was not guaranteed.

In November, a trial court sentenced Aasia Bibi, a Christian farmhand, to death on charges of blasphemy. She was charged following a June 2009 altercation with fellow workers who refused to drink water she had touched, arguing that it had become unclean because she was a Christian. Such discrimination against Christians was widespread. They were often not allowed to touch the pots used by Muslims.

Calls by civil society and the Christian community for a presidential pardon for Aasia were met by threats by Taliban and a cleric announcing a reward for anyone who killed her. As extremist elements riled up angry mobs against any change in Aasia's sentence, the Taliban warned of serious consequences if the government pardoned her.

A mob in Narang Mandi, near Lahore, burned and robbed houses of five Christian families in March over alleged involvement of the families in the murder of a local landlord's son. In June, a Muslim landlord in Okara detained 43 members of a Christian family after a Christian boy reportedly eloped with the landlord's daughter. The landlord threatened to kill all the detained Christians unless the girl was returned to the family. In September, unidentified men torched a church near Shah Latif Town in Karachi.

### *Hindus*

The situation and treatment of Hindus in Pakistan was generally not very different from that of other religious minorities. However, in the year under review several members of the Hindu community became victims of abduction and violence in Balochistan as well, where they had lived in relative safety for generations.

According to the Balochistan director for the Federal Ministry of Human Rights at least 27 families of Hindus in Balochistan had sought asylum in India on account of the security threats they faced. In October, one senator informed the Senate Standing Committee on Minorities' Affairs that 500 Hindu families from Balochistan had migrated to India for fear of abduction for ransom or because of threats to the lives of members of the minority community.

Hindus in Pakistan, particularly in Sindh, reported feeling particularly vulnerable ahead of an Indian high court's verdict in September regarding a dispute over the ownership of the land on which the Babri Mosque stood before it was demolished by Hindu extremists in 1992. They said that ahead of the high court verdict Hindu families in many areas had sent children and women to relatives' houses in Hindu-majority areas for a fear of backlash from Muslim extremists.

The demolition of a temple adjacent to a Shamshan Ghat in Rawalpindi in June triggered protests by the Hindu and Sikh communities. The land had apparently been leased by staff of the government authority administering the site to a person who had been using it for commercial purposes and who demolished the temple. The president ordered an inquiry into the demolition. If the findings of the probe were submitted to the president by the end of the year they were not made public.

### *Sikhs*

The religious minorities have long expressed displeasure and a lack of say in the manner properties associated with their holy sites are administered. According to Sardar Sham Singh, head of the Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (PSGPC), the greatest

threat to land attached to Sikh holy sites in Pakistan came from employees of the Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETPB), a body created, in theory, to protect lands and other property linked to non-Muslim religious sites. The PSGPC head said individuals in collusion with corrupt ETPB employees gave peanuts as lease or rent to the board and later leased or rented the same on higher market rates themselves.

He accused employees of the ETPB of at times destroying land records to facilitate land grab, and occupation and sale of land. He said the ETPB employees had recently sold land to the Defence Housing Authority in Lahore, in violation of the ETPB's own rules that prohibited the sale of any land owned, possessed or maintained by the ETPB. According to him, protest by the Sikh community in Pakistan and abroad, and diplomatic and media pressure had resulted in saving a number of holy sites but 'there is nothing we can do about land grabbing because it involves powerful people and dishonest board officials simultaneously. We do not have the numbers or the resources for such fights.' He stated that the best way to protect the Sikh holy sites in Pakistan was for the sites to be handed over to Sikhs. Views of leaders of other minority communities were almost identical with regard to administration of property linked to non-Muslim religious sites.

As many as 25 of the 102 Sikh families forced to flee Orakzai Agency in Pakistan's tribal areas were able to return to the area in October after a military operation there. The Sikhs, who had been living in Orakzai for generations, were forced to flee the area after Taliban militants asked them to pay *Jizya*<sup>3</sup> or leave the area.

The beheaded body of Jaspal Singh, one of the three Sikhs abducted from the Khyber tribal region in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) around a month earlier, was found in Orakzai Agency on February 21. The kidnappers had demanded Rs 20 million by February 20 for Jaspal's release. The other two Sikhs were rescued after a security forces operation on March 1.

## The Blasphemy Law

As in previous years, a large number of people were charged under the blasphemy law. According to media reports and police statistics, at least 64 people were charged under the law. As many as 49 of these cases were registered in the province of Sindh alone, according to the provincial police department.

Three men accused of blasphemy—a Muslim man Shamsul Hassan in Sangarh district of Sindh and two Christian brothers Sajid and Rashid Emmanuel in Faisalbad—were killed while in police custody by extremists, although the charges against them were yet to be proved. In Mirpurkhas, Sindh, two Ahmedis, Rana Khalil Ahmed and Rashid Iqbal, who had been accused of blasphemy were in police custody when two attackers tried to kill them. They survived and the attackers were arrested.

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<sup>3</sup> is a per capita tax levied on a section of an Islamic state's non-Muslim citizens, who meet certain criteria.

A glance at developments with regard to the blasphemy law in the year 2010 characterized not only the government's flip-flopping on reform of the controversial law but also showed how it lost its nerve in the face of intimidation by extremists after flirting with the idea of reform.

In February 2010, the federal minister for minorities' affairs, Shahbaz Bhatti, stated that the government intended to change the blasphemy law to check its misuse by extremists. He said the government was proposing the changes to counter 'some elements [that] misuse the law to create violence and disharmony in society'. He did not elaborate on the time or the precise nature of the changes, which were generally believed to be amendments in procedure to safeguard against abuse of the law. Nothing substantial happened in that regard until the end of the year.

The blasphemy law became the focus of renewed scrutiny following the imposition of the death sentence on November 8 on Aasia Bibi, a farmhand from Sheikhpura district in the Punjab province. She was charged under the law following a June 2009 row with fellow workers. Her conviction was followed by protests by the Christian community and Pakistani and international human rights organisations, which called for her release and for the president to exercise his constitutional powers to pardon her. Religious groups threatened anarchy if the government granted clemency to Aasia, mobilising protesters onto the streets. The government initially gave signals that Aasia would be pardoned but did an about turn in the face of pressure from extremist elements. By that time sentiments had been flared by radical elements to such a degree that prospects of any reform of the law in the near future seemed remote.

The government was criticised for not showing the initiative in seeking to rectify the shortcomings of the blasphemy law prior to Aasia Bibi's conviction and even then responding with half-hearted measures. In early December, when Aasia's appeal against her conviction was pending in the Lahore High Court, Maulana Yousaf Qureshi, the main cleric of the historic Mahabat Khan Mosque in Peshawar announced a reward of half a million rupees for anyone who murdered her. Qureshi said: 'No president, no parliament and no government has the right to interfere in the tenets of Islam. Islamic punishment will be implemented at all costs.' He reportedly told a rally, 'We will strongly resist any attempt to repeal laws which provide protection to the sanctity of Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)... Anyone who kills Aasia will be given Rs 500,000 in reward from Masjid Mahabat Khan... We expect her to be hanged and if she is not hanged then we will ask the mujahideen and the Taliban to kill her.' No action was taken against the cleric although incitement to murder is a criminal offence under Pakistani law.

Such incitement and violence against blasphemy accused has not been rare. As many as 34 people accused of blasphemy under Section 295 of the Pakistan Penal Code had been killed extra-judicially from 1986 until the end of 2010. Around half of these people were non-Muslims. That figure showed the threats anyone charged under the blasphemy law faced no matter how unfounded the charge. Even families of the individuals so charged often had to relocate to safer places on account of threats to their safety.



On January 3, 2011, Punjab Governor Salman Taseer was assassinated by one of his police guards—Mumtaz Qadri, who said he had killed the governor for voicing his opinion against the blasphemy law. Taseer had visited Aasia Bibi in jail and promised to convey her petition for pardon to the president. Clerics had issued an edict against Taseer a few days earlier, stating that he had become an apostate by supporting Aasia and by criticising the law. The governor's assassination by a member of his own security detail highlighted both the extent to which extremists had permeated the law enforcement agencies and the government's inability or unwillingness to root out such elements from the agencies.

Other guards had stood by for nearly one minute as Qadri fired all the bullets of his automatic weapon at the governor. Taseer's murder also demonstrated the hazards involved in voicing support for blasphemy accused or even pointing out any deficiencies in the law.

The government was criticized for its conduct in the events leading up to Taseer's assassination. The government had announced its intention to amend the blasphemy law and the president had ordered a ministerial review that concluded the verdict against Aasia was legally unsound. Former information minister Sherry Rehman proposed legislation to amend blasphemy law and Federal Minister for Minorities Affairs Shahbaz Bhatti spoke in support of Aasia and called the offer of a reward for her murder 'immoral, unjust and irresponsible'.

Federal Law Minister Babar Awan stated on November 25—amid calls for changes in the law, and for the president to use his authority to pardon Aasia Bibi as well as amid protests by the hardliners against any such action—that there would be no change in the blasphemy law under his watch. '[A]s long as I am law minister, no one should think of finishing this law,' he is reported to have said in a written statement to a newspaper. On November 29, amid reports that President Asif Zardari was to use his constitutional power to pardon Aasia Bibi, the Lahore High Court ordered the president not to use his authority under Article 45 of the Constitution to pardon her.

The high court order was criticized by human rights organizations and senior lawyers, because it was passed on an executive action that had not in fact occurred and because it suspended the constitutional prerogative of the Executive. Comparisons were also made between how the president had used his authority to pardon Interior Minister Rehman Malik in May 2010 within hours of a court reviving the minister's prison sentence for non-appearance in two corruption trials and how the president took nearly three weeks to consider a pardon for Aasia Bibi despite the favourable findings of the ministerial inquiry. On December 30, the government publicly announced that it had 'no intention' to repeal or amend the blasphemy law. The retreat by the government was criticized as appeasement of extremist groups, which marginalized tolerant voices, and left Sherry Rehman and Shahbaz Bhatti more vulnerable and isolated and made life even more difficult for persecuted minorities. Amid increased violence and threats of violence, civil

society found speaking out about the blasphemy law's shortcomings to be all the more hazardous.

A Working Group on Communities Vulnerable Because of their Beliefs, set up by HRCF in 2010, noted that although decisions such as Asaia Bibi's conviction were often overturned by the judiciary on appeal, it was a matter of concern that trial court judges felt compelled to make such decisions, often because of pressure from extremists elements and mobs that packed the courtrooms during hearings of such cases.

In late December 2010, media reports suggested that the Council of Islamic Ideology (CII) had recommended amendments to stop the abuse of the blasphemy law. The CII is Pakistan's top constitutional advisory body on Islamic injunctions. It stated that the government should take all appropriate administrative, procedural or legislative measure to stop misuse of the law. The CII recommended a change in the procedure for the registration of cases under the blasphemy law, asking that the police must investigate the complaint systematically before registering a case. It reportedly recommended that it should be made obligatory for the complainant to produce concrete evidence to substantiate the charges while lodging a complaint with the police. Blasphemy cases should be tried by the high courts, members of the CII reportedly observed.

## **Hate Speech**

Hate speech, violence and threats of violence against members of minority and vulnerable communities continued throughout the year 2010, with clerics speaking against the minority and vulnerable communities in religious congregations and Friday prayers sermons.

Hate campaigns, including some in mainstream newspapers, against members of minority faiths that often branded members of entire minority communities as agents of other countries also continued. There were scores of instances of the use of mosque loudspeakers to promote hatred and violence against the minorities. Some minority communities, such as the Ahmedis, were targeted more than the others in hate campaigns, often through the use of stickers, wall chalking and distribution of pamphlets.

In July, the federal minorities minister said that his ministry planned to submit a draft legislation before parliament soon against 'hate preaching and printing, and distribution of hate material'. The minister also spoke of suggestions made to the education ministry and madrassas to include texts on interfaith harmony and religious tolerance in the curriculum. However, the draft law on hate speech was not tabled in parliament until the end of the year, nor any change made in the curriculum to reflect any desire for interfaith harmony.

Impunity for promoters of hate speech continued to be the norm. Even official condemnation of preaching of hatred or meaningful legal action against the perpetrators largely remained absent.

There was little consequence for extremists perpetrating faith-based hate speech and for instigating discrimination and hostility towards and, at times, social boycott of members of minority and vulnerable communities. The violence in Gojra in 2009 and in Faisalabad in 2010 were some of the recent examples of violence fuelled by hate mongering and abuse of mosque loudspeakers. The textbooks even at the elementary level preached segregation and superiority of Muslims over non-Muslims.

## **Acknowledging Diversity**

In April, the federal ministry of minorities announced that 10 religious festivals of the minorities would be celebrated officially in Pakistan. The festivals included Besakhi, Dewali, Holi, Eid-e-Rizwan, Chelumjust, Nauroz, Christmas and Easter. To recognise the contribution, services and sacrifices by the minorities in the creation of Pakistan and to highlight the vision of the Quaid-*e-Azam* on religious freedoms and tolerance, elaborated in his address to the Constituent Assembly on August 11, 1947, it was decided to observe August 11 as 'Minorities' Day'.

However, practical measures to address concerns of minority communities were in short supply. Little was done to educate the students in a manner that they learn to appreciate and respect not just religious, but also cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity. There were few opportunities in the schools to learn about the contribution members of religious minorities had made in Pakistan.

## **Personal Law**

According to the Constitution of Pakistan, all communities are entitled to follow their personal laws. However, lack of codification of personal laws of some religious minorities in Pakistan meant that matters such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, etc., were regulated by customary law. One of the biggest concerns for religious minorities such as Hindus, Sikhs and Baha'is was the lack of a mechanism for registration of marriages. Married couples did not have any official certificate showing that they were married, which proved a hurdle for married women in acquiring passports. The couples had to make individual petitions in courts and although the courts issued such orders they applied only to the petitioners and were not the ideal solution to the absence of a marriage registration mechanism. Lack of registration of marriages also had implications for legal recourse for spouses in case of matrimonial disputes.

In February, the federal minister for minorities informed the National Assembly that the Hindu, Sikh and Bahai communities had been demanding separate marriage laws and the matter would be addressed in a Minority Protection Bill the government was working on. He said that three meetings had been held with representatives of the Hindu, Baha'i and Sikh communities and hoped the bill would be presented before the National Assembly within three months. The bill was not presented in the National Assembly until the end of the year.

## **Status of the Commission for Minorities**

The inadequacy of specific mechanisms to redress concerns and complaints of members of minority and vulnerable communities were highlighted. There was a fair bit of confusion over whether a Commission for Minorities existed in Pakistan, and if it did, how did it operate to safeguard the rights of these communities. The only hint that such a body was in existence came from the occasional official accounts of reports of the commission stating that it had awarded stipends and sanctioned money for renovation of places of worship. It certainly was not common knowledge who the members of the commission were and little consultation was held with the minority communities for their nomination. In May 2009, National Assembly's Standing Committee on Minorities had expressed reservations about the performance of the National Commission for Minorities and had observed that "since its establishment, the Commission has not been able to protect and safeguard religious, social and cultural rights of the minorities" in Pakistan.

There are few specific mechanisms to redress complaints of members of minority communities. Although a Commission for Minorities exists in name it is not known how it operates to safeguard the rights of the minorities, who its members are, and how they are appointed. The incumbent commission has been criticized for neither being independent nor autonomous. The HRCP Working Group on Communities Vulnerable Because of their Beliefs has called for the Commission for Minorities to be a statutory body, established by an act of parliament, which must have the mandate to address discrimination against minorities in laws, policies and practices. It has been suggested that the commission should have the power to receive and entertain complaints and take all measures necessary to redress those complaints, including referring matters to courts.

## **Displacement and Discrimination**

Discrimination on the basis of faith was reported amid the massive floods in the summer of 2010. In August, 500 Ahmedi families displaced by the floods from Dera Ghazi Khan, Muzaffargarh and Rajanpur districts of southern Punjab were denied relief goods and shelter by government officials and local clerics on account of their faith. The displaced families were expelled from a government school in Dera Ghazi Khan and from rented lodgings elsewhere in southern Punjab following clerics' edicts that the affected Ahmedis must not be provided help.

Christians displaced by the floods in Punjab also complained about discrimination in distribution of relief goods. District officials in Sukkur reportedly observed Sikhs and Hindus being pushed away from food distribution points. In Karachi, the complete lack of religious sensitivity led nearly 600 Hindu flood victims to stage a protest after they were given beef to eat.

## Representation

The federal government's decision to allocate four seats in the Senate to minorities under the 18th Amendment was hailed by religious minorities across Pakistan. Earlier there was no member from the minority communities in the Senate. However, there was still not a single directly elected member of a religious minority in any of the four provincial assemblies or in the national parliament of Pakistan, mainly because the mainstream political parties did not field candidates from religious minority communities. Minorities and women, two groups most discriminated against in the country, were not given representation on the constitutional reform committee that came up with the draft of the 18th Amendment.

## Honour killings

Some segments, such as women and lower caste Hindus, suffered discrimination and violence from within their communities as well as from the majority Muslim population. At least 17 members from minority communities were killed in the name of honour by their families. These included 11 Christian and six Hindu girls and women.

## Suicide

In the year under review, 2,399 people committed suicide in Pakistan and 1174 attempted suicide but survived. Of those committing suicide at least 73 were members of religious minority communities, whereas at least 21 members of minority communities unsuccessfully attempted to take their own lives.

## Sectarian violence

As many as 418 people were killed in violence against various Muslim sects in the year under review, including 211 in suicide attacks. A total of 963 people were injured in such attacks, including 628 people in suicide attacks.

In sectarian attacks in 2010, the terrorists targeted religious processions and mosques of the Shia sect in Rawalpindi, Sargodha and Lahore; processions of *Barelvis* on *Eid Miladun Nabi* in Faisalabad and Sargodha; a Sunni *Ittehad* rally in Pakpattan; shrines and mosques in Lahore, Pakpattan, Mian Channu and Bahawalpur; target killing of activists of the *Ahl-e-Hadith* sect and banned *Sipah-e-Sahaba* Pakistan in Lahore and Bahawalpur, respectively.

Tensions and clashes continued in Kurram Agency, in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas, between Shia and Sunni tribes. The violence kept the main road linking the region to the rest of the country blocked throughout the year and caused problems for the local population's access to provisions as well as healthcare services.

## **Recommendations**

- There is an urgent need to weed out discriminatory provisions from laws as well as the unbridled hate speech and promotion of intolerance and minorities' inferiority from the curriculum.
- The state must perform its primary duty, of protecting the right to life of all its citizens, irrespective of religious belief and providing them a safe environment to profess their religion. The citizens facing additional threats because of their faith should be afforded protection commensurate with the threats.
- No instance of incitement to violence or intolerance must go unpunished and the state must ensure effective prosecution without exception against all hate mongers.
- Personal law for all minorities that demand such a law to regular their family affairs must be immediately promulgated in consultation with the minority communities.
- The Commission for Minorities must be made independent and autonomous. The commission's functions and relevance to the problems of the minority communities must be publicized and access to the commission for the very people whose problems it purports to address must be facilitated.
- If the government is unable to repeal the blasphemy law in the short term, it must highlight abuse of the law to target innocent individuals and must ensure that safeguards are included in the law to prevent abuse.