

PRESS RELEASE

Dated: May 27, 2008

Mr. Shafique Chaudhry Chief Coordinator PCHR strongly condemns persecution of minorities in the country, Urges government to safe guard minority rights

Islamabad: Mr. Shafique Chaudhry, Chief Coordinator Parliamentarians Commission for Human Rights (PCHR) in a meeting with the delegation of Peace World Wide (PWWp) led by its Chairman Mr. Hector Aleem held at PCHR office expressed his grave concern over the increasing incidents of persecution of minorities in Pakistan at the hands of law enforcing agencies and urged the government to safeguard the rights of minorities in line with international human rights standard. Talking to the delegation regarding the loopholes and lacunas in the existing laws regarding minorities and discriminatory attitude of law enforcing agencies he said that police register cases against minorities despite of clear instruction by the Govt. to conduct preliminary inquiry by Superintendent of Police before registering of blasphemy cases, police continues to register cases without observing this instruction. Most of the blasphemy cases are registered by low rank police officers who do not understand the sensitivity of the matter that results unrest among the minorities.

He further stated that members of religious minorities were subject to violence and harassment, and police at times refused to prevent such actions or charge persons who committed them, leading to an atmosphere of impunity. Shafique Chaudhry Chief Coordinator PCHR cited the Constitution of Pakistan Article 25 Equality of Citizens (1) All citizens are equal before law and are entitled to equal protection of law. The Constitution also provides in its Article 36 for special Protection of minorities. Earlier Chairman PWW Hector Aleem discussed case of Hafiz Abad recently filed under Blasphemy Law section 295/c with Chief Coordinator PCHR to raise the issue with the relevant authorities and resolve the matter urgently. PCHR Chief Coordinator assured the delegation that PCHR would take urgent consideration of the matter to resolve it and take remedial steps to prevent such incidents in the future and provide full protection to minorities in the country. Chairman PWW told that aside from religious feuds and socio-cultural/economic deprivation, the official policies of appeasement and the emphasis on religious uniformity had allocated second-class citizenship to millions of Pakistanis. Rather than redressing this problem, the policy of appeasement had continued, further marginalizing these communities. He said that this had led to a rise in cases of socio-psychological depression among these communities.

PCHR Chief Coordinator urged the government and civil society representatives to join hands to uplift minorities and grant them their due rights as enunciated in core international human rights treaties. He also proposed to establish human rights education institutions for policy makers, judiciary, human rights activists, lawyers, civil society representatives and law enforcing agencies members to educate them regarding human rights in general and minorities' rights in particular in order to make human rights friendly protective policies and implement them in letter and spirit in the country. He also stressed upon the government that equality of all citizens before law should be ensured by law enforcement agencies particularly by the police. Special orientation sessions should be organized to make them aware of their responsibilities towards minorities." Political representation in local bodies must be given to the minorities according to their population in that area. Government should also take serious steps for providing more jobs to minority people", he told. To ensure the respect of sanctity of religious places, he anticipated that, all matters related to management and development of places of worship of minorities should be managed by minority communities at district level. He further also proposed that there should be district committees or district complaint cells for the redressal of minorities' complaints or problems.

Media Cell, PCHR