

PRESS RELEASE

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National Conference on Minorities approves the proposed draft of National Minorities Policy and National Plan of Action on minorities with consensus

Islamabad: - Majority rule is a means for organizing government and deciding public issues. It is not another road to oppression. Just as no self-appointed group has the right to oppress others, so no majority, even in a democracy, should take away the basic rights and freedoms of a minority group or individual. Minorities need to trust that the government will protect their rights and self-identity. Once this is accomplished, such groups can participate in, and contribute to their country's prosperity. This was stated by Chairman Parliamentarians Commission for Human Rights, Pakistan Mr. Riaz Fatyana MNA in his welcome address to the participants of one day National Conference on "Protection of minorities rights in Pakistan: issues, challenges and way forward" organized by Parliamentarians Commission for human rights on Wednesday.

The National Conference was attended by National and provincial legislators, Government officials, Minority rights activists, Religious leaders from Minorities like priests, Bishops, and Civil society representatives.

Executive Director PCHR Kashmala Tariq MNA, Abdul Mujeeb Peerzada MNA, Chief Coordinator PCHR Shafique Chaudhry, Vice chairman Human Rights Commission of Pakistan Mr. Kamran Arif advocate Dr Shoaib Suddle, Director General National Police Bureau, Anthony Lobo, Bishop Rawalpindi, Akram Masih Gill MNA Chairman National Standing Committee of Minorities Affairs, Mehreen Anwar Raja MNA, Dr. Shanker Lal MPA Sindh, Jay Perkash Minister Minorities Affairs Baluchistan, Basant Lal MPA Baluchistan, Ambroz Jan MPA Baluchistan, Gur Saran Lal MPA NWFP, Rochi Ram Advocate, M Perkash Advocate Chairman Minority rights Commission of Pakistan, Mangla Sherma, Peter Jacob from National Commission of Justice and Peace, Joseph Masih, Cecil Chaudhry, Naeem Shakir Advocate, Former Federal Minister S.K Tressler, Former Senator Mrs. Roshan Khurshid Baruja, were prominent speakers among other civil society members and media men who participated in this one day National Conference.

Minister of State for minorities Professor Mushtaq Victor was Chief Guest at inaugural session, while Ambassador of Netherlands Mr Willem Andreae was guest of honour.

The participants of one day national Conference on "Protection of minorities in Pakistan :Issues, challenges and way forward" approved the initial draft of proposed draft of Nation minority Policy and National Plan of Action on minorities with some changes, which have been prepared by Parliamentarians commission for human Rights after an extensive nation wide consultative exercise . This Proposed policy and National Plan of Action (NPA) will now be presented to Government of Pakistan at different levels. Executives of Parliamentarians commission for Human Rights Mr. Riaz Fatyana ,Ms Kashmala Tariq and Minister of State Minorities Professor Mushtaq victor will soon call upon President Musharraf and Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz to present the recommendation of this conference, which would then be forwarded to Ministry of minorities for further action.

Speaking as Chief Guest at the inaugural session, Minister of State for Minorities, Professor Mushtaq Victor remarked that Government is fully alive to protect the rights of minorities ensuring their full participation in

all decision making bodies. Maximum efforts are required to minimize the plight of minorities in Pakistan. This conference will be a hallmark in the way forward for the protection of Minorities Rights in Pakistan and conferences of these kinds bring us around the table to sit together and to find way forward to the solution of minorities rights.

His Excellency Mr. Willem Andreae, Ambassador Nederland appreciated the efforts of PCHR to highlight and address the issues of religious minorities in Pakistan. He said, like other countries, Pakistan too is facing challenges with respect to full integration of religious minorities in public, political and economic life. Taking up these sorts of challenges is not an easy task, fundamental changes are to be made, and broad consensus in society is necessary.

Chairperson Commonwealth women Parliamentarians (CWP) and Executive Director PCHR, Kashmala Tariq MNA in her key note address urged upon the minority leaders for unity and adopting realistic approach towards their problems. She assured them to move up these issues in the parliament .She invited their suggestion on proposed National Minority Policy and National Plan of Action and assured that their recommendation would be incorporated in final draft which would be forwarded to Government.

Chief Coordinator PCHR, Shafique Chaudhry remarked that despite the fact that the constitution of Pakistan aims to safeguard the rights of minorities in Pakistan, there had been certain episodes that indicate the bigoted and discriminatory behavior as well as practices against religious minorities on the part of a few groups of individuals and in some cases individuals.

There are varied concerns of different individuals and groups over the issue. The need of hour is to probe into the problem through mutual discourse and analytical vigor. People having different concerns over the matter should hold joint interactive discussions and dialogue, so as to figure out the remedy.

Head of National Police Bureau, Dr. Shoaib Suddle told the participants that as per constitution every citizen should be equally treated by law enforcement agencies. He announced that a special cell would be established in National Police Bureau to collect data about cases registered against minorities .He requested the minority leaders and activists to report such cases to his office directly and also hoped for the cooperation of PCHR in this regard.

Akram Masih Gill, Chairman National Standing Committee stated that we are already striving for the protection of rights of minorities. Recommendations extract from today's conference will be presented in committee meeting to find out the solution of these problems. Talking about his personal efforts in this regard, he remarked that he always have provided solutions to the problem of minorities and will continue this struggle. He appreciated the concern and interest of President of Pakistan for the protection of minorities rights.

Bishop Anthony Lobo stated that there is a need to create positive thinking in our youth which will lead toward interfaith harmony of the society. Abdul Mujeeb Peerzada MNA commented that proper role of majority and minority can bring positive change in the country. We all have to work together for the progress of this country despite of the status of being minority or majority.

Media Cell, PCHR