

112TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. RES. 164

Expressing the condolences of the House of Representatives to the people of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan upon the assassination of Shahbaz Bhatti, Minister for Minorities, who courageously advocated for religious freedom and tolerance in Pakistan and calling on the United States to renew its efforts with international partners in the Human Rights Council and the United Nations General Assembly to promote religious freedom and tolerance in accordance with international human rights standards.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MARCH 10, 2011

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey (for himself, Mr. WOLF, Mr. ACKERMAN, Mr. CAPUANO, Mr. DUNCAN of South Carolina, Ms. JACKSON LEE of Texas, Mr. DANIEL E. LUNGREN of California, Ms. SPEIER, Mr. JONES, Mrs. SCHMIDT, Mr. ROHRABACHER, and Mr. SIRES) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs

RESOLUTION

Expressing the condolences of the House of Representatives to the people of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan upon the assassination of Shahbaz Bhatti, Minister for Minorities, who courageously advocated for religious freedom and tolerance in Pakistan and calling on the United States to renew its efforts with international partners in the Human Rights Council and the United Nations General Assembly to promote religious freedom and tolerance in accordance with international human rights standards.

Whereas Shahbaz Bhatti, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan's Minister of Minorities, and an unapologetic champion of the right of religious freedom and other human rights of all Pakistanis, was shot to death in his vehicle on March 2, 2011, by a group claiming to oppose Bhatti's efforts to reform Pakistan's blasphemy laws;

Whereas Governor Salman Taseer, who courageously sought to release Aasia Bibi, a Christian woman and mother of 5 who was unjustly sentenced to death under Pakistan's blasphemy laws, was gunned down in broad daylight by his own security guard on January 4, 2011, allegedly because the Governor supported reforms to the blasphemy laws;

Whereas Pakistan is a multireligious society comprised of Muslims, Christians, Hindus, Parsis (Zoroastrians), Sikhs, Buddhists, Baha'is, and others;

Whereas Islam is the state religion and Pakistan's Constitution states that "subject to law, public order and morality, every citizen shall have the right to profess, practice, and propagate his religion" and that there shall be no discrimination in rights based on religion in the provision of government services, property rights, education, and public access;

Whereas Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founding father of Pakistan, envisioned a nation of religious plurality and equality;

Whereas support for religious freedom and related human rights in Pakistan will help ensure the future of Pakistan as a free, strong, and vibrant society and that enduring stability in Pakistan will come from an active civil society in which religious freedom flourishes;

Whereas Minister Bhatti spearheaded the “Joint Declaration of National Interfaith Consultation”, that was issued on July 12, 2010, in Islamabad, which was signed by prominent imams and minority religious leaders and which stated that “Pakistan is a homeland of peaceful people with diversified colours, races and religions which is being targeted by the conspirators to harbor hate amongst various sects and religions to propagate extremism and terrorism” and “reiterated that the followers of all faiths and sects will support the cause of national integration and interfaith harmony in the country”;

Whereas interfaith dialogue and respect for diversity reflects the multireligious nature of Pakistan and the vision of Pakistan’s founder;

Whereas the government of President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Yousef Raza Gilani appointed the first cabinet-level official on religious minorities, Minister for Minorities Shahbaz Bhatti, on November 3, 2008, and reappointed him on February 11, 2010, the only Christian in the cabinet, to protect the rights of minorities as envisioned under Pakistan’s Constitution of 1973;

Whereas the Government of Pakistan allocated a quota of 5 percent of all federal jobs for members of minority religious groups through a law passed and implemented on May 26, 2009;

Whereas, in 2008, the Government of Pakistan for the first time recognized the holidays of minority religious groups in addition to Muslim holidays;

Whereas, on August 11, 2009, President Zardari declared August 11 as “Minorities Day” to celebrate and recog-

nize the role that Pakistan's minorities played in the country's independence and development;

Whereas the parliament unanimously passed a resolution denouncing the August 1, 2009, attacks against Christians in Gojra, Punjab, and affirming that their rights should be protected in accordance with the vision of the founder of Pakistan;

Whereas the parliament unanimously passed a resolution condemning the May 28, 2010, Lahore attacks on the Ahmadi mosques, and calling for a thorough government investigation and swift and just prosecution of the perpetrators of the attacks;

Whereas Prime Minister Gilani announced 3 days of mourning after the assassination of Minister Bhatti and declared at the funeral that the government would do its "utmost" to bring the murderers to justice;

Whereas Professor Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, Secretary General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, has condemned the assassination of Minister Bhatti and called for the perpetrators to be brought to justice;

Whereas extremist groups have used the blasphemy laws to trigger sectarian violence, intimidate members of religious minorities and others with whom they disagree, and exploit these laws for their own political ends;

Whereas the blasphemy laws have been wielded falsely against Muslims and non-Muslims alike for the settling of personal disputes, and the law is used against Muslims more than any other religious group;

Whereas vigilantes have murdered individuals accused of blasphemy before, during, or after trials, even when the accused have been acquitted, such as the July 19, 2010,

assassination in Faisalabad of Christian Pastor Rashid Emmanuel and his brother Sajjad as a police officer escorted them from a court hearing on the blasphemy charges against them;

Whereas there is a correlation between the lack of religious freedom protections for all, the persecution of religious minorities, and the rise of violent religious extremism, which threatens Pakistan's national security as well as the security interests of the United States and its international partners;

Whereas the United Nations General Assembly and Human Rights Council have continued to adopt resolutions on "defamation of religion" or "vilification of religion" that fail to address the abuses associated with blasphemy laws and elevate the "rights" of a religion over an individual's right to freedom of religion and freedom of speech as recognized by international human rights standards;

Whereas incidents of religious intolerance, discrimination, and related violence, as well as of negative stereotyping of the individual based on religion or belief, plague many countries and effective measures should be taken consistent with their obligations under international human rights law to address and combat such incidents;

Whereas Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes that "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance";

Whereas Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes that “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers”;

Whereas Articles 18 and 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights protect freedom of religion and expression enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;

Whereas Minister Bhatti gave his life to uphold the universal values of freedom of religion and expression for the sake of vulnerable minorities;

Whereas it is the foreign policy of the United States to promote internationally the right of everyone to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, as well as freedom of speech in accordance with international human rights standards; and

Whereas these values are advanced through interfaith dialogue, punishment of violence and discrimination against religious individuals, and by governments and other leaders, including the media, choosing to set an example of civil and responsible discourse: Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved*, That it is the sense of the House of Rep-
2 resentatives that the United States should—

3 (1) include a special working group on inter-
4 faith harmony and religious tolerance in United
5 States-Pakistan strategic dialogues to discuss ways
6 to continue the vision of Shahbaz Bhatti in both
7 countries;

1 (2) urge the Government of the Islamic Repub-
2 lic of Pakistan to reform the blasphemy law, so as
3 to ensure it is no longer abused to limit the rights
4 of Pakistanis, whether Muslims or religious minori-
5 ties;

6 (3) assist efforts to protect the religious free-
7 dom of all Pakistanis through prioritizing the pre-
8 vention of religiously motivated and sectarian vio-
9 lence, enhancing training for local law enforcement
10 including emergency response and scene investiga-
11 tion, prompt and thorough investigation of any inci-
12 dents of violence, and training of judges on inter-
13 national human rights obligations;

14 (4) work with its partners in the United Na-
15 tions to support resolutions promoting religious free-
16 dom and tolerance, including the prevention of nega-
17 tive stereotyping of individuals based on religion or
18 belief;

19 (5) engage with its international partners to en-
20 sure promotion of interreligious dialogue and protec-
21 tion and promotion of religious freedom and related
22 human rights for all people by—

23 (A) supporting civil society institutions
24 that work to uphold and guarantee religious
25 freedom and related human rights;

1 (B) promoting interreligious dialogue de-
2 signed to strengthen civil society and advance
3 religious freedom;

4 (C) using all available tools of public diplo-
5 macy to spread positive messages about reli-
6 gious freedom and tolerance;

7 (D) encouraging efforts to strengthen in-
8 stitutions crucial to rule of law and good gov-
9 ernance, particularly the judiciary and police;
10 and

11 (E) recognizing the importance of pro-
12 grams such as the Fulbright Program, the
13 International Visitor Program, and other ex-
14 changes for professionals, students, and reli-
15 gious and civil society leaders from diverse com-
16 munities, including programs that emphasize
17 tolerance for minority groups; and

18 (6) call on the Government of Pakistan and all
19 other governments to continue the same tradition of
20 leadership and courage as was shown by Minister
21 Bhatti in the fight against violent religious extre-
22 mism in every form.

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