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ICMICA MIIC

Intervention

For the 6th Session of the Forum on Minority Issues

26 - 27 November 2013

Agenda 4, **Interfaith dialogues, consultation and exchanges**

Speaker: Shahid Rehmat

Thank you Mr/Mdm. Chairperson

Youth Development Foundation and ICMICA Asia would like to draw the attention of the Forum to the situation of the religious minorities in Pakistan. Currently, the religious minority groups are confronted with challenges to live peacefully in Pakistani society. This year, there have been several incidents which target religious minorities. On February 17, 2013, a bomb exploded and killed least 84 people in Quetta, Baluchistan; on March 09, 2013 an angry mob set fire to over 100 homes in the Joseph Colony Christian settlement, near Badami Bah (Lahore). Residents were forced to flee and at least 35 people were injured. And On 22nd September 2013, two suicide bombers killed themselves in All Saints Church in Peshawar, during a religious service. It killed at least 78 persons, including 34 women and 7 children, and wounded hundreds. It was one of the deadliest attacks against Christian in Pakistan. The Christians and other religious minorities are frequently targeted by members of the majority because of misconceptions, isolation and a lack of platforms for interaction, dialogues and exchanges. It is alleged that they are targeted due to their faith.

Pakistan has increasingly become a society whereby means and platforms for interaction and dialogue among different religious and ethnic entities seem to have been ignored, if not systematically discarded. This situation is exacerbated by the lack of opportunities for inter-faith dialogue, which has increased the myths about the history of different faiths and misconceptions about other religions, cultural beliefs, values, and traditions. Most of the perceptions and knowledge about other persons' faith is based on hearsay or second-hand information, which is often biased and incorrect. Almost all of the recent inter-faith conflict has roots in lack of understanding about others' faith due to lack of inter-faith platforms. This inter-faith conflict, which has its root cause in lack of exposure and tolerance, fuels violent extremism because much of extremist activity is supported by hatred of the "other" and a narrow interpretation of religious mandates.

<http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Lahore,-more-than-100-Christian-homes-burned-over-blasphemy-charge-27347.html> See the report of Amnesty International at <http://www.amnesty.org/en/for-media/press-releases/pakistan-authorities-must-do-more-protect-hazara-community-deadly-attacks-2>.

See the report of the Asian Human Rights Commission at <http://www.humanrights.asia/news/ahrc-news/AHRC-STM-129-2013>

See the report of asianews.it <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Lahore,-more-than-100-Christian-homes-burned-over-blasphemy-charge-27347.html>

We appreciate the establishment of the new Interfaith Harmony Division after June 30 headed by a federal minister following the devolution of the Ministry of Minorities to the provinces under the 18th Amendment. We therefore support Draft Recommendations 53 thru 56 on the issues related to interfaith dialogues, consultation and exchange visits. We believe that now is the time for the Government of Pakistan to effectively implement those recommendations.

Finally, we urge the Government of Pakistan through this forum to:

1. To adopt measures to ensure the opportunities for constructive interfaith dialogues, consultation and cross faith exchange programs for youth.
2. Invest more in Capacity Building for Peace Building and Advocacy for youths and Children as to ensure notions of non-discrimination are instilled while minds are young and before prejudices have settled down.
3. To ban hate speeches against religious minorities.
4. To invite the UN Independent Expert on Minority Issues and the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of religion or belief to make a country visit.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.

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