

111TH CONGRESS
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H. RES. 764

Expressing the sense of the House of Representatives on the importance of inter-religious dialogue and the protection of religious freedom and related human rights for persons of all faiths and nationalities in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SEPTEMBER 23, 2009

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey (for himself and Mr. MCGOVERN) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs

RESOLUTION

Expressing the sense of the House of Representatives on the importance of inter-religious dialogue and the protection of religious freedom and related human rights for persons of all faiths and nationalities in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

Whereas the Islamic Republic of Pakistan is a multi-religious society comprised of Muslims, Christians, Hindus, Ahmadis, Parsis (Zoroastrians), Sikhs, Buddhists, Baha'is, and others;

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 there is a correlation between the lack of religious freedom protections for all, the persecution of religious minorities, and the rise of religious extremism, which threatens Pakistan's national security and ultimately United States national security interests;

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

Whereas while Islam is the state religion, the 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 the government of President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Yousef Raza Gilani appointed the first cabinet-level official on religious minorities, Minister of Minorities Affairs Shahbaz Bhatti, on November 3, 2008, to protect the rights of minorities as envisioned under the 1973 Pakistan Constitution;

Whereas the Government of Pakistan allocated a quota of five 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 U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom has found that a number of Pakistan's laws, including those criminalizing blasphemy and restricting the rights of Ahmadis, frequently result in imprisonment on account of religion or belief and/or violence against the accused;

Whereas blasphemy allegations, which often are false and for which due process is lacking, result in the lengthy detention of and sometimes violence against Muslims, as well as Christians, Ahmadis, Hindus, and members of other religious minorities;

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 Prime Minister Gilani has expressed support for reviewing the blasphemy laws for which prescribed penalties include life imprisonment and the death penalty, saying "a committee will review the laws detrimental to religious harmony to sort out how they could be improved";

Whereas education is a major vehicle for the transmission of ideas, attitudes, and beliefs, and some madrassas (religious education institutions) in Pakistan have taught extremist doctrine in support of terrorism;

Whereas interfaith dialogue reflects the multi-religious nature of Pakistan and the vision of Pakistan's founder;

Whereas the foreign policy of the United States is to promote internationally the right of everyone to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion in accordance with international human rights standards and the United States Government supports interfaith dialogue among persons of all faiths and nationalities;

Whereas reducing extremism and related violence is a key goal of the United States in its relations with Pakistan; and

Whereas Minister of Minorities Affairs Bhatti has launched an initiative on interfaith dialogue, which promotes inter-religious respect and tolerance at the national level, and establishes at the district and local levels interfaith councils designed to promote respect among different religious communities and counter religiously motivated enmity and violence: 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) ensure the promotion of inter-religious dia-
4 logue and protection of religious freedom and related
5 human rights are key components of the United
6 States engagement strategy with the Islamic Repub-
7 lic of Pakistan by—

8 (A) clearly articulating a concern for up-
9 holding religious freedom and related human
10 rights as an essential element of United States
11 engagement with Pakistan;

1 (B) supporting efforts by the Government
2 of Pakistan to foster inter-religious dialogue by
3 using its civilian financial assistance to
4 strengthen initiatives by the Ministry of Minori-
5 ties Affairs to promote inter-religious respect
6 and tolerance at the national level, and to es-
7 tablish at the district and local levels interfaith
8 councils designed to promote respect among dif-
9 ferent religious communities and to counter re-
10 ligiously motivated enmity and violence;

11 (C) supporting Pakistani civil society insti-
12 tutions that work to uphold and guarantee reli-
13 gious freedom and related human rights and
14 ensuring that nonmilitary assistance emphasizes
15 respect for human rights, religious freedom,
16 civil society, constitutional processes, and demo-
17 cratic institutions;

18 (D) using its nonmilitary financial assist-
19 ance to Pakistan to strengthen institutions cru-
20 cial to Pakistan's democratic development, par-
21 ticularly the judiciary and police;

22 (E) expanding programs leading to the
23 sustained engagement of the United States with
24 the Pakistani people, such as the Fulbright
25 Program, the International Visitor Program,

1 and other exchanges for professionals, students,
2 and religious and civil society leaders from all
3 of Pakistan’s diverse communities;

4 (F) urging the Government of Pakistan to
5 set national textbook and curriculum standards
6 that actively promote respect for the religious
7 beliefs of others; and

8 (G) ensuring that the United States Em-
9 bassy and the United States Agency for Inter-
10 national Development (USAID) mission support
11 these initiatives;

12 (2) support efforts by the Government of Paki-
13 stan to protect the religious freedom of all Paki-
14 stanis and prioritize the prevention of religiously mo-
15 tivated and sectarian violence and the punishment of
16 its perpetrators by—

17 (A) investigating acts of religiously moti-
18 vated and sectarian violence, and punishing per-
19 petrators in a timely manner; and

20 (B) repealing the blasphemy laws; and

21 (3) urge the Government of Pakistan to review
22 other legislation that restricts the right to profess,
23 practice, and propagate religion or that constitutes
24 discrimination on the basis of religion or belief in

- 1 order to bring Pakistani law into conformity with
- 2 international human rights standards.

