

# Celebrations of World Interfaith Harmony Week

**Narrative Report**  
**Feb 1-7, 2013**

Submitted to  
World Interfaith Harmony Week



Submitted By  
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# Narrative Report

**Implementing Organization:** BETHAK-Pakistan  
**Contact Person:** Shahzad Francis, Head of Programs  
**Program Title:** Interfaith Cultural Festival  
**Geographic Area:** South Punjab-Pakistan  
**Implementation Period:** Feb 1-7, 2013

## 1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND:

### **History of the Organization:**

The idea of BETHAK-Pakistan was conceptualized by a group of concerned activists and community leaders in October 2004, as non-profitable and non-political organization that would work for the interest of the disadvantaged and marginalized sections of the society by building their capacities through awareness, education and skill based development. **BETHAK** is an acronym of “**Be Empowered Through Awareness & Knowledge**”. In Punjabi language the word BETHAK is a distinct stratum of society where people sit on a certain place to discuss their plans and lines of action for the development of a society. Founders keeping in view the plight of the marginalized communities in southern Punjab, Pakistan who had lived for a long time under the situation so oppressive that their capacity for critical consciousness had been silenced. These poor people as small farmers, field workers and daily wages workers were intimately forbidden to think for themselves. They had absorbed an attitude of passivity, submission and self deprivation imposed on them by that culture. BETHAK aimed at making these people aware of their position as a group, so that they could unite and work for positive change which demands love and acceptance of all without any distinction of caste and creed. This is what BETHAK stands for.

### **Vision:**

BETHAK envisions a society where there is JUSTICE, EQUALITY, PEACE and PROSPERITY for all the members of society to make social change more visible in implementation.

### **Mission:**

The mission of “BETHAK” is to cover a broad range of activities to eliminate religious, gender, ethnic, racial and all sorts of discrimination and support human development activities and implement a policy of more equitable sharing and distribution of love which can be a common platform for economic, social, and human goals.

## **PROBLEM STATEMENT:**

The repeated incidents of burning the houses and property of Christians on false accusation of desecration of the Holy Quran, a religious book of the Muslims, by Christian young men at Village 72/10-R, Shantinagar, district Khanewal in 1997, Village Bahmaniwala of district Kasur, Christian Colony Sambrial of district Sialkot, Christian colonies at Gojra and Korian of district Faisalabad and several other individual incidents of Christian young men killed on the same false charges made the social / religious organizers to come forward to help our Christian community to come out of this psychological trauma. They made regular contacts with the people of these colonies and especially in our target areas in Khanewal region, where people are facing difficulties because of religious prejudices against Christians.

The unbalanced economic situation, unstable political condition, terrorism, religious discrimination suicidal bomb blasts, religious fundamental groups, unemployment, lack of health education and uncertain future has very likely affected the lives of people of religious minorities in Pakistan as a group of individuals who can not defend their rights of honorable living.

Unfortunately, there are institutions available but they are also affected by the current situation and are unable to play their role in a proper way. The positive role of youth has been finished and they have turned into angry youth. The above said current situation of the country, vague future, lack of entertainment facility and lack of proper formation, guidance and capacity building the youth at present is one of the most affected groups of the society which need attention by developing positive thinking, providing healthy opportunities, character formation and personality development. They don't see any brighter future and have lost every courage of competing the challenges of the new era. The stubborn attitude is seen in daily life because of depression of inferiority complex. At present there is a need to strengthen the social institutions about the values and customs of the society which gives the lesson of forgiveness, peace, strong relationship and tolerance as men of courage and equal status.

It is hoped that having provided such awareness to our people; they would be enabled to contribute their share to the enrichment of society and establishment of a culture of peace in conflict prone society of Pakistan. They should know that they are not alone, God who made them and placed them in this breath taking world will be at their side to inspire and guide them as they forge ahead to make the world a better place than they find it now.

## **Justification:**

The Islamic Republic of Pakistan is a poor and highly populated country and requires all laws to be consistent with Islam where Muslims are in majority (97 % of the population) and Christian, Hindus, Ahmadis and Parsis are in minority. The minority groups are allowed to practice their religion openly but there are some conservative religious groups engaged in promoting their own code of morality for Pakistani society. But such activities make hard for the minority groups to grow prosperously with the majority groups.

Some parts of Pakistan are more prone to violence than others. Violence is often committed in the name of religion. In the last few years there has been a sharp rise in

sectarian thinking and violence in different areas where a significant minority population resided in cities, towns and villages. The intolerant feelings of Muslim communities are very often visible in different shapes in all walks of life in district Khanewal. If no substantial efforts are made to promote Peace and Harmony through Interfaith Dialogue, it is expected that tension between the minority groups will not end in this area.

## **2. LOCATION AND FOCUS GROUPS:**

### **Location:**

The project has been implemented in Four District of South Punjab, Pakistan, which has mixed population of Christians, Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs in target area such as:

- Khanewal
- Vehari
- Multan
- Rahim Yar Khan

### **Focus Group:**

College / University Students, representatives of youth networks and NGO's, intellectuals, politicians, teachers, scholars, journalists, religious leaders and social activists.

BETHAK organized a team of 5 members to contact people of good will from all walks of life and tried to convince them to join hands with BETHAK to bring people of all faiths closer to one another as people of same culture. There had been individual as well as collective meetings with intellectuals, journalists, religious leaders, politicians and youth of all faiths. BETHAK's efforts proved successful and a group of intellectuals, mass media personnel's, teachers and students showed their willingness to be a part of BETHAK's Program for promoting a culture of peace in South Punjab. The biggest achievement of BETHAK was to achieve the sympathies of religious leaders of Ahl-e-Hadees, Deobandi and Shiah sects. Besides all this the 4 local NGO's and human rights activist of Khanewal also helped BETHAK to hold thought providing meetings on promoting a culture of peace in South Punjab.

### **Direct Beneficiaries:**

150 (Youth, and adults)

**Indirect Beneficiaries:** People of Four Districts

## **3. GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND RESULTS:**

### **Goal:**

To focus composite Culture and cultivate cultural values and attitude among people of different background this will encourage individual and collective groups for building peaceful communities, societies and ultimately a peaceful world.

## **Objectives:**

To help the youth to understand the social context and develop leadership at mid-level to initiate action at policy level and serve as catalysts to people of different faiths, sects and cultural background to sustain culture of peace and harmony initiatives in the country and neighboring countries.

## **Sub-Objectives:**

- To work for a clear understanding of peace and harmony in the context of composite Culture.
- To identify the dynamics of personal and social transformation particularly in the area of women, youth and environment of peace.
- To analyze our mission together on the issues and problems that retards our mission toward peaceful living.
- To be of more effective services to the people of South Punjab using the framework of social teaching designed by different religions.

## **Project Activities:**

- **Why to promote a culture of peace**

As defined by the United Nations, the Culture of Peace is a set of values, attitudes, modes of behaviour and ways of life that reject violence and prevent conflicts by tackling their root causes. Peace is rooted not in treaties but in the nurturing of values and attitudes that give life to the principles of co-operation, non-violence, respect for human rights and cultural diversity, democracy, and tolerance. To cultivate the growth of these ideas we must work to:

- foster a culture of peace through education
- promote sustainable economic and social development
- promote respect for all human rights
- ensure equality between women and men
- foster democratic participation
- advance understanding, tolerance and solidarity
- support participatory communication and the free flow of information and knowledge
- promote international peace and security

South Punjab has become a breeding place for producing fanatic extremists and sectarian prejudices. After 9/11 incident many young boys and girls along with their teachers and students friends in public schools and colleges have been very badly poisoned against the minorities as well as people of other Muslim groups.

Many instances of religious discrimination and sectarian prejudices had been noticed not only in public schools and college because that many minority students had dropped out of schools and colleges with out completing their education last year. In the year 2010 applications for appointments in education department were demanded and more than 70 minority candidates applied for various vacancies. It is very disappointing

to point out that not a single minority candidate was appointed in spite of being declared on merit.

An other incident of religious discrimination took place in Govt. High School 80/10-R Pirowal. All the 16 Christian girls studding in that were declared failure in the annual examination. The matter was brought to the notice of DEO, Khanewal and the papers of the Christian girls were rechecked and 13 out of 16 Christian students had passed in the annual examination. The director BETHAK and the DEO visited the GGHS 80/10-R and the teachers were warned to refrain from showing any sort of religious discrimination against any student of other faith or creed.

These were causes that made BETHAK–Pakistan to seek the help of Christian Study Centre, Rawalpindi for promoting a culture of peace in this conflict prone area of southern Punjab.

### • **Progress towards promotion of a Culture of Peace**

As mentioned earlier in the prologue of the need for promoting a culture of peace, that BETHAK's contact team made individual as well as collective visits to people of all walks of life. It resulted in motivating students, teachers, professors, intellectuals, and human rights activists, members of People's Party, Tehreek-i-Insaf and PML. The district press media and its officer bearers became active supporters of BETHAK's peace promoting activities. They not only participated in all BETHAK's peace promoting activities but also gave an excellent coverage in their newspapers as the clips of the clips of news would speak of their cooperation and concern for BETHAK's activities.

BETHAK's female peace promoters not only succeeded in motivating Muslim college students but they also reached out the female youth and their families in various suburban colonies of Khanewal city including the Khanewal city families as well.

The number of participants kept on increasing successively as the BETHAK's activities progressed step by step for six months from November 2010 to April 2011. The biggest charm of these activities for the participants was that they freely participated in question-answer sessions and also came up with several practical suggestions to improve our activities for promotion of peace.

### **Activity 01:**

## **Candle Vigil and one minute silence for the victims of Bomb Blasts in Pakistan**

### **Results / Outcomes:**

- ❖ People did feel a great sympathy for the innocent victims of bomb blasts and target killing in Pakistan
- ❖ Awareness was created in society about importance of Tolerance and living together as people of same culture.
- ❖ People were sensitized that it was a common issue of interfaith society at grass root level.

### **Activity 02:**

## **Peace Prayer Performance**

### **Result / Outcomes:**

The diverse group of different ages, professions and occupations, had gathered to explore and brainstorm on the vital issue of peace as well as the role of culture in promoting peaceful society

### **Activity 03:**

## **Peace & Sufi Songs**

### **Results / Outcomes:**

- ❖ Artists showed their willingness to promote culture of Peace through Music.
- ❖ Media gave an excellent coverage of the Peace Song Festival not only in local newspapers as well as in national news papers.

### **Activity 04:**

## **Cultural Dance**

### **Results / Outcomes:**

- ❖ Youth discovered and understood ways in which people from other cultures think and act.
- ❖ Meeting promoted and supported the role of young people in peace-building activities that can contribute to live together in dignity and dialogue.
- ❖ Cultural Dance helps the communities get together as people of the same culture and soil.

### **Activity 05:**

## **Addresses by Renowned Columnist and Human Rights Activist of Different Faiths**

### **Results / Outcomes:**

- ❖ Participants adopted new skills, knowledge, values and developed social cohesion through concept of Composite culture.
- ❖ These Addresses built confidence and created opportunities among Activists to develop competencies on peace and social cohesion to live and work in dignity and to participate in development of peaceful society.

- ❖ Provided awareness that all people belong to the same society with common origin and destination.

### **Activity 06:**

## **Comedy Performances as token of Pleasure for all**

### **Results / Outcomes:**

- ❖ Through the Comedy Performances people of different faiths were sensitized to come out of their every day fears of death around them.
- ❖ These performances got people out of their every day's tensions and made them feel pleasure and enjoyment.

### **Activity 07:**

## **Sharing of Meal**

### **Results / Outcomes:**

- ❖ Sharing of meal formed a firm platform on which to build a better future where diverse people can feel that they belong to same culture.
- ❖ A feeling of religious acceptance for one another as people of the same creator was developed.
- ❖ Participants learned how to accept people in work places without any discrimination.

### **Activity 08:**

## **Peace Awards**

### **Results / Outcomes:**

- ❖ The Activists who worked for peace were encouraged to do more for promoting peace and harmony in the society.
- ❖ Participants were encouraged to join BETHAK's activities to bring peace and harmony in society without any prejudices.

### **Success Story:**

Pope John Paul II, a great champion of promotion of dialogue between faith and culture in Asia, towards integral human and social development, said "God speaks to people through their cultures and sows the "seed of His World" in every human culture because God wants all people to be saved". For this reason people of all faiths should

be in dialogue with their own cultures in order to discover the seeds of Divine Message planted in their faith which take root, grow and bear fruit. By coming into dialogue with the cultures of others people are challenged to expand their horizons, reexamine prejudices and preconceptions and learn to respect others.

BETHAK in collaboration with CSC, Rawalpindi, has tried to achieve culture of peace through its activities framed on the basis of common culture of this land Our activities regarding cultural dialogue have resulted in discovering the lived values of our neighbors of other faiths. These activities have helped the communities to learn about the good, true and beautiful values and get them integrated into their lives by respect the freedom and dignity of each person as a people of the same soil.

Youth is the major vehicle for humanism, which is, in essence, respect on human nature. Promoting culture of peace education is important for the existence of human society in the modern globalizing era. Education can function as a unifying factor and produce informed and active citizens of an interdependent world. It can provide the tools for advocacy and resolution of conflict that are necessary for the maintenance of culture of peace between nations and people. BETHAK succeeded in getting youth involved in promoting a culture of peace not only in their families but on their workplaces as

These activities helped BETHAK to establish Peace cultural committee at region level, consisting upon Muslim-Christian youth, intellectuals, politicians, media personnels, religious leaders, teacher/professor, and advocates.

They admitted that before attending BETHAK's activities they were not aware of the common cultural values of the people of different faiths living in this region. As they have been sensitized and motivated about the importance of our cultural heritage and its role in bring people together on the same platform through cultural celebrations. It would build strong social relationships among the communities to live in peace and harmony.

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