

## “Seminar on International Day of Interfaith Harmony”

- **Organized by:** International Law Division, Islamabad Policy Research Institute
  - **Date:** February 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023
  - **Venue:** Jinnah Hall, IPRI
  - **Speakers:**
  - Brig (R) Raashid Wali Janjua, Director Research, IPRI (Welcome Address)
  - Ms. Maham Naweed, Chair of Lawfare and International Law, IPRI (Opening Statement)
  - Senator Krishna Kumari, Senate of Pakistan, (Guest Speaker)
  - Dr. Shoib Suddle, Chairman One-Man Commission on minorities rights, (Guest Speaker)
  - Bishop Rt Reverend Nazir Alam, Bishop of Pakistan, United Church, (Guest Speaker)
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### **Key Takeaways**

- Promoting interfaith harmony among various stake holders of Pakistan on the issues of religious intolerance.
- Nurturing an environment of stability and encouraging dialogue among different religious representatives.
- Initiate peace programs through dialogue at grassroot level to facilitate conversations between various communities in an atmosphere of mutual respect.
- Condemning discrimination in every form, whether based on faith, race, sex, age, language, or religion.
- Required special measures to empower female participation in political and economic spheres of life to counter inequalities and mistreatment towards women.
- Creation of regional bodies is imperative to protect the dignity of religious sites, scripture, and personalities.
- Promoting comparative religious studies at college and university levels.
- Promoting religious/cultural understandings of multiple faiths through field trips, student exchange programs, cultural events, seminars.

## **Recommendations**

- All stakeholders must join hands to promote religious harmony and pluralism in the society.
- Developing an extensive framework for the protection of Minorities.
- Encourage the participation of minorities in all political and civil forums.
- Implementation of penal laws with respect to protection of the symbols/scriptures and holy personalities of various faiths.
- Minorities protection committees at grassroot level.

## **Speakers**

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### **Dr. Raashid Wali Janjua, Director Research at IPRI (Welcome Address)**

- Dr. Janjua welcomed the speakers and referred to the speech Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, on August 11, 1947; wherein, he said that “religion will not be a subject of the state and believers of all faith would be free to exercise their rights without any discrimination”. This is what is needed, as we go on to further the message of interfaith harmony in Pakistan.
- He emphasized on the crucial importance of tolerance, inclusiveness and pluralistic society that is a key feature for nations stability and peace.
- In addition, he mentioned the impulsive emotions of followers attached to their respective religions.

### **Ms. Maham Naweed, Chair International Law (Opening Statement)**

- Ms. Maham explained the idea of commemorating UN World Interfaith Harmony Week. She emphasized greatly on the need for dialogue among inter and intra faiths.
- Regarding various religions, she stressed on the importance of dialogue for creating a peaceful and a healthy environment to achieve prosperity.

### **Senator Krishna Kumari, Senate of Pakistan, (Guest Speaker)**

- Pakistan is a Muslim majority country; therefore, it is crucially important to promote tolerance towards minorities.
- Harmony among masses at grassroot level will contribute in the prosperity of a state.
- Senator Krishna Kumari highlighted the importance of arranging these programs creating awareness on Interfaith Harmony.
- Madam Senator explained the role and destructive use of social media to propagate fake news which results in violent extremism.
- There is a need to stop spreading fake news based on unauthentic information.
- She quoted the constitution of Pakistan, where minorities are substantively provided fundamental rights.
- Madam Senator explained the issue of forced conversions in the province of Sindh. She opined to voice against these horrible acts to protect minorities rights.
- Reference was made regarding “Minority Protection Bill” which was passed by the National Assembly of Pakistan, subsequently rejected by the Senate of Pakistan.
- Senator Krishna Kumari strongly condemned the rejection of the said bill which was of no harm to Muslim population.

### **Dr Shoib Suddle, Chairman Minority Commission (Guest Speaker)**

- Dr Shoib Suddle detailed out the issue of minority crisis in Pakistan with respect to the law-and-order situation since 2013 when the first barbaric attack was carried out on a church in Peshawar killing more than 100 Christians.
- He interlinked the terrorism in Pakistan as an outcome of post 9/11 politics and the global war on terrorism.
- Then in 2014, Army Public School attack and subsequent security situation necessitated the Supreme Court to take a Suo Moto notice for the minority’s protection.
- Justice Tassaduq Hussain Jilani of the apex court had formed a commission to ensure welfare and protection of the minorities in Pakistan in 2014.
- This order of the court immensely strengthened the institutional support for the minorities in job quota and over all protection.

- He said that 5 per cent quota for the minorities in jobs and other preferential stipends in education were provided by the state to the minorities.
- In terms of syllabus, hate material was taken out and reformation of the curriculum by including teachings and history of other religions played a positive impact.
- Dr Suddle also pointed out the special Central Superior Services exams that was held only for the minorities in Pakistan and more efforts are required to ensure the rights of minorities in Pakistan.

### **Bishop Rt, Reverend Nazir Alam, Bishop of Pakistan (Guest Speaker)**

- Bishop Nazir Alam dispelled the impression that the minorities are on the receiving end in Pakistan and are being victimized.
- The constitution and the state institutions guarantee equal fundamental and civil rights and the problem, if any, rests in its implementation, he said, adding that such a practical discrepancy should not be used to promote a sense of marginalization.
- He also observed that the issue of forced conversion is blown out of proportion and there is no such thing by intuition by any segment of the society.
- He necessitated the need to analyze such incidents and allegations in the individual case domain and not to summarize it as a societal problem.

### **Press Release – Feb 7, 2023, International Day of Interfaith Harmony**

- ISLAMABAD: International Day of Interfaith Harmony was marked on Tuesday at Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI) by organizing a seminar, which was participated by a distinguished panel consisting of Dr. Shoib Suddle, Chairman One Man Commission; Bishop Rt. Reverend Nazir Alam, United Church of Pakistan, and Senator Krishna Kumari. Acting President IPRI Brig (retd) Dr Raashid Wali Janjua and Chair Law IPRI Maham Naweed introduced the panel and underscored the need for promoting a dialogue on communal and interfaith harmony.
- Dr Janjua referred to the speech of Father of the Nation, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, on August 11, 1947, wherein he said that religion will not be a subject of the state and believers of all faith shall be free to exercise their rights without any discrimination. He

said that this is what is needed as we go on to further the message of interfaith harmony in Pakistan.

- Bishop Nazir Alam negated the impression that minorities are on the receiving end in Pakistan, and are being victimized. He said that the constitution and the state institutions guarantee equal fundamental and civil rights and the problem, if any, rests in its implementation. He said that such a practical discrepancy should not be used to promote a sense of marginalization.
- He also observed that the issue of forced conversion is blown out of proportion, and there is no such thing by intuition by any segment of the society. He necessitated the need for analyzing such incidents and allegations in individual case domain, and not to summarize it as a societal problem.
- While pointing out the state of affairs of Hindu community in Pakistan, Senator Kumari, who herself belongs to a scheduled caste and has risen to the highest echelon of policy-making in the country, said that minorities are well protected in Pakistan, and there is a need to further the harmony by resorting to more legislation where Hindus and minorities are exposed to highhandedness.
- Dr Shoib Suddle said detailed out the issue of minorities' crisis in Pakistan in the law and order sphere since 2013 when the first barbaric attack was carried out on a church in Peshawar. He said that terrorism and otherness wave in Pakistan is an outcome of post 9/11 politics and the war on terrorism. The 2014 Army Public School attacks and subsequent security fissures, he pointed out, necessitated the Supreme Court to take a suo motu notice for minorities protection. He said that Justice Tasaduq Hussain of the apex court had formed a commission to ensure welfare and protection of minorities in Pakistan in 2014, and this happening has literally strengthened the institutional support to the minorities in all constitutional sincerity.
- He said that 5 percent quota for minorities in jobs and other preferential stipends in education go on to underscore the importance that the state provides to the minorities. He remarked that taking out of hate material from syllabus and reforming the curriculum by including teachings and history of other religions are introductory notes are a welcome omen.

- Dr Suddle, Chairman One Man Commission, pointed out at the special CSS exams held for minorities in Pakistan recently, and said that efforts are underway to ensure rights of the communities in all spheres of law and realms of life at par with the majority community.
- Talking about the age of marriage, the panel was of the view that there should no tab on it, and quoted the example of Bangladesh where matrimonial age is 21. This has resulted in lessening the population of Bangladesh, and at the same time empowering the women.
- The seminar noted that there is much that needs to be done to promote minorities culture and religious values by educating the masses, and realizing the great civilizational belongings of Buddhism that is found in Pakistan.

### **Media Coverage:**

- <https://ipripak.org/event/ipri-seminar-un-world-interfaith-harmony-week/>, IPRI - Islamabad Policy Research Institute (ipripak.org)
- <https://www.bolnews.com/business/2023/02/ipri-organises-seminar-to-mark-interfaith-harmony-day/>, IPRI organises seminar to mark Interfaith Harmony Day (bolnews.com)
- <https://dailytimes.com.pk/1060683/speakers-for-educating-masses-to-ensure-minorities-rights/>, World Interfaith Harmony Week and Pakistan (dailypakistan.com.pk)
- [https://twitter.com/IPRI\\_Pak/status/1622559362769358849?s=20&t=9dy5kHiq504YcYxOd8JQqQ](https://twitter.com/IPRI_Pak/status/1622559362769358849?s=20&t=9dy5kHiq504YcYxOd8JQqQ)
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