

Press Release

April 2011

Assassinated Bhatti Would Have Been Keynote Speaker at Religious Liberty Conference in Washington DC

(HERNDON, Virginia, April 2011) Religious freedom organizations united under the [Religious Liberty Partnership](#) (RLP) have released a statement condemning the recent death of Pakistani Minorities Minister Shahbaz Bhatti, and calling for immediate action from Pakistan's government and the international community.

“This statement is the very least we can do to pick up the mantle and uphold the memory of our friend Shahbaz Bhatti , who was to have been a keynote speaker at this year’s Religious Liberty Partnership Conference in Virginia,” says Mervyn Thomas, CEO of Christian Solidarity Worldwide in the UK, and Chairman of the Religious Liberty Partnership.

In what is referred to as, “The Virginia Statement on the Islamic Republic of Pakistan,” the RLP calls on Pakistan's government “to establish a judicial inquiry into the murders of Shahbaz Bhatti and Salman Taseer,” as well as to “release and publicize the resulting report.” Additional recommendations include implementing measures to prevent misuse of the Blasphemy Laws, and to work toward the abolition of the controversial law.

“During his life, [Bhatti] achieved much for all religious minorities in Pakistan, and his campaign to outlaw the notorious blasphemy laws were certainly in tune with the pluralistic ideals of the country’s founding father Quaid-e-Azam Mohammed Ali Jinnah,” Thomas says, “We hope and pray the Pakistani authorities, the international community, and the worldwide Church will take the necessary action to ensure Shahbaz Bhatti’s death will not have been in vain.”

The Religious Liberty Partnership, with member organizations in 20 countries, is calling on the international community to recognize the plight of Pakistani Christians, and other minority believers in what the statement deems an “epicenter of religious intolerance.”

Godfrey Yogarajah, Executive Director of the Religious Liberty Commission for the World Evangelical Alliance, and member of the Religious Liberty Partnership Leadership Team, says that “Shahbaz Bhatti paid the supreme price with his life for standing up and speaking up for the poor, marginalized and the persecuted.” He adding that, “if the spiraling trend of violence are not dealt with immediately it will result in a breakdown of law and order and the very fabric of Pakistani society could crumble causing instability and anarchy.”

NOTE: The Religious Liberty Partnership (RLP) is a collaborative effort of Christian organizations around the world focused on religious liberty. The RLP seeks to more intentionally work together in addressing advocacy and in raising the awareness of religious liberty issues globally. Besides Mervyn Thomas and Godfrey Yogarajah, the leadership team is made of: Ron Boyd-MacMillan, Open Doors International; Anne Brandner of Global Peace Initiative, Canada; Andy Dipper of Release International, UK; Linus Pfister, HMK Switzerland; Daniel Hoffman of Middle East Concern. A full listing of RLP members is on the Virginia Statement.

For more information about the Religious Liberty Partnership or the Virginia Statement, please contact

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