

PRESS RELEASE

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CHRISTIAN LEADERS CALL UPON UNITED NATIONS TO ASSIGN REFUGEE STATUS TO PAKISTAN'S ENDANGERED CHRISTIAN MINORITY

(HERNDON, Virginia, April 2011) The [Religious Liberty Partnership](#) (RLP), a coalition religious freedom organizations have joined together to call upon the UN High Commissioner for Refugees to recognize the plight of the endangered Christian population and assign them refugee status. In addition the RLP have also called upon the government of Pakistan to renew its commitment to reforming the country's notorious blasphemy laws and work towards their abolition.

In a statement issued following the death of Pakistani Minorities Minister Shahbaz Bhatti, "The Virginia Statement on the Islamic Republic of Pakistan," also called upon Pakistan's government, 'to establish a judicial inquiry and public report into the murders of Shahbaz Bhatti and Salman Taseer.' Further recommendations include the implementation of international standards of non-discrimination based on race, religion and gender as outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the opportunity for all non-Muslim students to study a faith of their own choice rather than the imposition of Islamic education.

Despite the murders of Shahbaz Bhatti and Salman Taseer the RLP recognizes the Pakistani coalition government's courageous statements in condemning these acts of senseless violence and the courageous stance of President Asif Ali Zardari in declaring that, "We will not be intimidated nor will we retreat".

"Shahbaz 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, said Mervyn Thomas, CEO of Christian Solidarity Worldwide, UK, and Chairman of the Religious Liberty Partnership. "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."

In the Virginia Statement, the RLP applauds the work of the church around the world, including the several Dioceses of the Church of Pakistan, which has generously given humanitarian relief, disaster aid, assistance to displaced people, and practical assistance to victims of recent natural catastrophes in various parts of Pakistan. And recently after more than a decade of leading efforts by the Organization of Islamic Conference to pass "Defamation of Religions" resolutions at United Nations, Pakistan took

the lead in proposing a new resolution which more closely reflects international law on freedom of religion and freedom of expression.

Ronald Boyd-MacMillan, of Open Doors International said that “Pakistan’s beleaguered Christians have rarely felt so demoralized in the wake of Shahbaz Bhatti’s murder. May this statement galvanise the world wide Church to pray and act in greater solidarity with these precious Christians, and be such an unforgettable encouragement to them that they will never feel alone in their suffering again.”

NOTES TO EDITORS

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.

The RLP Leadership Team includes:

Ron Boyd-MacMillan, Open Doors International, The Netherlands;
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