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Green Party
for the South East of England

Commissioner Benita Ferrero Waldner
DG External Relations
The European Commission
200 Rue de la Loi
B1049 Brussels
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Dear Commissioner,

We have corresponded in the past about apostasy legislation in Sri Lanka and the Commission's commitment to reminding the authorities there about the need to respect human rights. I would like to bring a similar issue to your attention, this time with reference to Pakistan. The International Religious Freedom report for 2006 charts a series of abuses and states that in Pakistan "Police torture and mistreatment of those in custody remained a serious and common problem throughout the country and at times resulted in extrajudicial killings."

I wholly support Article 10, paragraph 1 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, and article 9 of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, which assert the 'freedom to change religion' and 'to manifest religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance.' At the same time I recognise that no religion is the same across the board and that all religions are subject to varying interpretations in the various different places in which they are practiced. Although Pakistan is not bound by EU legislation or other agreements, I believe the Commission must make use of the leverage it has to raise concerns about religious freedom in the country, specifically the proposed Apostasy Bill and the misuse of existing blasphemy laws. In support of my request I would like to draw your attention to the following cases:

Younis Masih from Chungi Amar Sadu, Lahore

Younis was found guilty in May 2007 of blasphemy against the Prophet Mohammed. He has been sentenced to death and his case has attracted the attention of Islamic extremists, who have threatened anyone involved in providing security or legal assistance to 'blasphemers'. Younis has appealed his conviction but faces death threats whilst detained and there are concerns about the possibility of a fair trial.

Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences, Nursing School, Rawalpindi

Four student nurses and two teaching staff have been suspended after an incident involving the desecration of a verse from the Koran, posted on a notice-board. Although there does not appear to be any evidence that these individuals were involved, indeed one of the members of staff, the Principal of the School of Nursing, was on leave at the time of the incident, the fact that they are all Christian seems to have led to their suspension. All six are extremely fearful that they will be charged with blasphemy.

In the first five months of 2007, 9 Christians have been charged with blasphemy in Pakistan, a marked increase on previous years and a trend that is increasing the sense of insecurity among all religious minorities. Forced conversion to Islam is also a problem as this case illustrates:

Charsadda

Christians in this Northwest Frontier Province were apparently been sent threatening letters, stating that they must convert to Islam by May 17th or face dire consequences. The letter also threatened to attack churches in the area and many Christians are moving away. Those that have remained wrote to President Musharraf and the Chief Minister of North-West Frontier Province on May 18th, a day after the deadline for conversion expired, urging for the authorities to provide proper security in the light of death threats. The

All Pakistan Minorities Association has established a Charsadda Peace Committee involving local Muslim and Christian leaders to promote 'inter-faith harmony, unity and tolerance'.

The Pakistani authorities have made some efforts to tackle religious persecution but the situation is deteriorating at a worrying pace, as this case shows:

Sahiwal Prison

In April this year, two prison staff at the central prison in Sahiwal, Punjab joined Muslim inmates in attacking four Christian prisoners who had gathered for prayer and bible study. The prison staff stripped the Christians of their clothing and physically tortured them. The four were locked up in solitary confinement, and no action was taken against the prison officials.

Both the issue of apostasy and blasphemy have been brought before Pakistan's National Assembly this year but the outcomes have not been encouraging. As I am sure you are aware, the Parliamentary Affairs Minister spoke out against the tabling of a bill to amend the blasphemy laws, claiming 'Islam is our religion and such bills hurt our feelings. This is not a secular state but the Islamic Republic of Pakistan'. The proposed reforms, which would have reduced the penalty for blasphemy against the Prophet Mohammed from execution to a five year sentence and fine, were defeated overwhelmingly. The National Assembly has also put forward an Apostasy Bill for consideration, the terms of which include the death penalty for male apostates and imprisonment, until penitence or death, for female apostates.

Finally, I would like to seek clarification, in relation to Pakistan, of member states responsibilities with regard to asylum claims under the EU's various human rights agreements. The UK government cites EU legislation as the cornerstone of its asylum policy and claims that failed asylum seekers are never returned to countries where they face persecution that would breach their human rights. You will know from previous correspondence that I dispute this and believe there are immense risks for those returned to eg DRC. A new case concerning a Christian family has come to my attention, which highlights yet again, the fact that member states like the UK are showing limited support for human rights when it comes to deportations.

The Karim family have exhausted the UK's asylum system and face forcible return to Pakistan, despite justifiable fears that their religion will make them the subject of potential persecution. Their MP made the following statement in the House of Commons:

[This case is now] the subject of an application for judicial review by the Karims' solicitors, who say that Ministers failed properly to consider new evidence, one piece of which concerned threats made to Nigel Karim's Christian mother.... The other related to a poster that has gone up in the area of Karachi where they lived. It shows a photograph of Nigel Karim next to a rather ominous drawing of a gallows and a reward of 500,000 rupees for information on Nigel Karim's whereabouts. He is referred to in this poster as "Nigel the Arrogant".

Given the cases cited above, other numerous examples of religious minorities being victimised, as well as the Pakistan National Assembly's stance on apostasy and blasphemy, surely the UK's decision to deport the Karim family is a breach of its own policy and of the family's human rights? Does the Commission intend to take any action against member states that disregard the EU's founding principles in this way?

Thank you for giving these related matters your attention and I look forward to hearing from you in due course.

Yours sincerely,



Caroline Lucas - Green Party MEP for South East England.