



RESPONSE TO PETITION

Prepare in English and French marking 'Original Text' or 'Translation'

PETITION No.: **421-02466**

BY: **MR. KMIEC (CALGARY SHEPARD)**

DATE: **JUNE 14, 2018**

PRINT NAME OF SIGNATORY: **SIGNED BY THE HONOURABLE CHRYSTIA FREELAND**

Response by the Minister of Foreign Affairs

SIGNATURE
Minister or Parliamentary Secretary

SUBJECT

PAKISTAN

ORIGINAL TEXT

REPLY

The promotion and protection of human rights is an integral part of Canadian foreign policy and remains a priority for our engagement with Pakistan. It is Canada's firm belief that the respect of human rights, including freedom of religion or belief, is fundamental to the development of more peaceful, inclusive, and prosperous societies. Canada has consistently called on the Government of Pakistan to meet its international commitments in this regard.

The Government of Canada remains concerned with the reports of forced conversions, spurious blasphemy charges and sectarian attacks against religious minorities in Pakistan. The Government of Canada, through the High Commission in Islamabad and other senior-level channels, has made its views on the challenges faced by religious minorities in Pakistan known directly to national and provincial authorities in that country.

The High Commission of Canada in Islamabad uses both the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives and the Post Initiative Fund to provide financial support to local civil society efforts to enhance promotion and protection of minority rights and inclusion in Pakistan. Recent projects with a focus on the Hindu community included assisting Hindu victims of forced conversion and marriage to seek legal redress and providing capacity-building to women entrepreneurs. These projects are in addition to efforts to help foster tolerance and inter-faith harmony, combat violent extremism and enhance the inclusion of minorities in the July 2018 election process.

Canada's development cooperation program in Pakistan supports initiatives to counter violence against women and girls, including child, early and forced marriages (CEFM). A recently concluded project on financial literacy for women entrepreneurs included awareness raising of community members on concepts of gender equality that led to 86% of trainees' attitudes towards child marriage changing positively. Two projects being funded through the Partnerships and Innovation Branch and the Global Issues and Development Branch of Global Affairs Canada are currently being implemented to reduce violence against women and girls and the prevalence of CEFM in Pakistan.

More broadly, concerns have also been expressed publicly through statements and social media, and through participation in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Pakistan at the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva. One of Canada's latest UPR recommendations to Pakistan was directly related to the protection of freedom of religion or belief and the misuse of the blasphemy laws, which applies to Hindus as well as other groups.

Further details and background on Canada's intervention on Pakistan at the 28th session of the UPR are available at: http://international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues_development-enjeux_developpement/human_rights-droits_homme/upr-epu/pakistan.aspx?lang=eng.

Canada has also established and currently co-chairs the International Contact Group for Freedom of Religion or Belief (ICG-FoRB), a unique platform which brings together some 30 countries committed to advancing freedom of religion or belief internationally. Freedom of religion or belief in Pakistan is regularly discussed in this forum, and various ICG-FoRB member countries have committed to raising these concerns with the Government of Pakistan in an effort to end ongoing violations and abuses of human rights.