

Dominicans for Justice and Peace, Dominican Leadership Conference, Franciscans International and Pax Christi International in conjunction with the World Council of Churches strongly consider that religious intolerance and discrimination on the basis of religion remain one of the root causes of a number of conflicts, wars and ongoing violence.

In her report to the 2005 Commission on Human Rights, the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief writes: “States have an obligation to ensure freedom of religion or belief to the persons finding themselves within their jurisdiction. Where acts of violence or acts of religious intolerance are committed against individuals, States have both the obligation to protect and an obligation to remedy the situation. Perpetrators must be brought to justice.” E/CN.4/2005/61; Report submitted by Asma Jahangir, Special Rapporteur on Freedom of religion or belief.

In its report to the 2004 Sub-Commission (E/CN.4/Sub.2/2004/29), the Working Group on Minorities stated that “attention was drawn to serious incidents of violence against religious minority groups in Pakistan. It was claimed that various laws and policies gave preferential treatment to the majority religious group and were discriminatory in their effect on religious minority communities.”

Religious discrimination in Pakistan

One example of systemic religious discrimination is found in Pakistani legislation that promotes a culture of intolerance, division and extremism. The legislation is the Blasphemy Laws 295 B and C and 298 A, B and C of the Penal Code that deals with offenses pertaining to religion. Such offenses carry the death penalty.

In March 2004, the Pakistani Bishops’ Commission called for the abolition of laws that discriminate against religious minorities and the establishment of an independent commission with judiciary powers to accept claims and reports from minority groups.

In a November 2004 letter to the President of Pakistan the National Commission for Justice and Peace of the Catholic Church stated that, in conjunction with the civil society organizations, it has struggled in the past 19 years to repeal laws that grossly violate the rights of deprived sections, especially women and religious minorities and asked that the government make the year 2005 the year of change and repeal of these discriminatory laws.

In this respect, we acknowledge the President of Pakistan’s announcement of a possible revision of the country’s Blasphemy Laws.

We also recognize that Pakistan had restored joint electorates in January 2002.

In addition to the blasphemy laws, several other laws and regulations, particularly articles and provisions of the Pakistani Constitution, discriminate against religious minorities.

Dominicans for Justice and Peace, Dominican Leadership Conference, Franciscans International and Pax Christi International in conjunction with the World Council of Churches bring to the attention of the UN Commission on Human Rights recommendations made by the Justice and Peace Commission of the Catholic bishops of Pakistan in their “2004 Report on the Religious Minorities in Pakistan”:

1. That the government of Pakistan repeals all discriminatory laws, including Blasphemy Laws section 295 B and C, and 298 A, B and C of the Pakistan Penal Code.
2. That an independent and permanent commission for religious and other minorities be instituted in Pakistan, with the powers of a Tribunal and the capacity to receive complaints and to provide redress.
3. That the government of Pakistan establishes an impartial and independent Commission of Inquiry to study the situation of religious minorities and make recommendations for improving the situation.
4. That the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry for Women are implemented.
5. That the government invites the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion and Belief to study and examine the situation in Pakistan with regard to his mandate and to assess developments as well as the implementation of the recommendations that Special Rapporteur made following his 1996 visit to Pakistan.
6. That the Constitution of Pakistan and statutory laws (articles and sections thereof) that discriminate against religious minorities be repealed.