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Dominicans for Justice and Peace, Dominican Leadership Conference, and Franciscans International are concerned about **the escalation of religious intolerance and discrimination on the basis of religion**. It is one of the causes of divisions, conflicts, wars and ongoing violence in many parts of the world. Furthermore, it is often seen also as a motivation for attacks by extremists against the minority religion or a particular group in a region. These factors impinge on the freedom of religion or belief of people in many countries and give rise to religious extremism.

### **Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief**

In her report to the 2005 Commission on Human Rights, the **Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief** wrote that: “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**

Pakistan is an example of a country where systemic religious discrimination is imbedded in its legislation that promotes a culture of intolerance, division and extremism. The legislation is known as the Blasphemy Laws 295 B and C and 298 A, B and C of the Penal Code that deals with offenses pertaining to religion

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

### **2005 Report on Minorities of the Bishops' J&P Commission**

The National Commission for Justice and Peace of the Bishops of Pakistan, in their July 2005 report on the human rights situation of religious minorities in the country, stated the following: ‘The overall conditions affecting the legal, civil, economic and constitutional rights of minorities continue to marginalize them and the systematic violation of their rights remains unchecked.’ It further states that the government’s attitude towards resolving the key issues of discrimination was “lethargic”. Except for a meager restoration of joint electorates for local body elections, no

progress was made. Further, there was no serious attempt made to repeal discriminatory laws such as: Blasphemy Laws, Hudood Ordinances, Zakat and Ushar, even though the President of Pakistan had announced in 2004 a possible revision of the country's Blasphemy Laws. The Bishops' report also stated that the syllabus in schools, colleges and universities as well as in the private and state controlled media continued to cater to biases and hatred against other religions.

### **Pakistan signs International Covenant**

Pakistan announced that it had signed the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. However, it has not ratified it yet. We regret also that Pakistan has not yet signed nor ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights nor its Optional Protocol that allows for individual complaints, nor the Optional Protocol aiming at the abolition of the death penalty.

Dominicans for Justice and Peace, Dominican Leadership Conference, and Franciscans International,

1. Solicit the government of Pakistan to invite 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 the Special Rapporteur made following his only visit to Pakistan, in 1996.
2. Urge the Pakistan government to move to the full ratification of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.
3. Invite the government of Pakistan to seriously consider ratifying the **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights** and the two Optional Protocols.