

May 17, 2011

The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Madam Secretary:

We are deeply concerned about Pakistan. The murders of Governor Salman Taseer and Federal Minister Shahbaz Bhatti, as well as the “systematic, ongoing and egregious violations of freedom of religion or belief” described in the 2011 Annual Report of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), lead us to respectfully urge you to designate Pakistan as a “country of particular concern” (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA). Further, the U.S. should supplement the designation by working behind the scenes to stress to the Pakistani authorities the value of advancing religious freedom in order to undermine extremism and terrorist sanctuaries.

To date, the Pakistani government has proven unwilling to implement needed reforms, and the USCIRF again recently recommended that Pakistan be so designated. Pakistan is glaringly absent from the CPC list and unquestionably meets the statutory threshold.

The IRFA standard for “particularly severe” violations of religious freedom is actions “engaged in or tolerated” by the government in question. Pakistani laws and constitutional provisions explicitly repress the religious freedom of all Pakistanis, Muslim and non-Muslim alike. The well-known blasphemy law carries the death penalty and three individuals during the past year have been sentenced to death or had death penalties confirmed on appeal. The anti-Ahmadi provisions in the constitution and criminal code are shockingly discriminatory and criminalize many of their religious activities. The lack of any effective government response to an increasing number of violent acts perpetrated by non-state actors against Muslims and non-Muslims also meets the “tolerated” provision of IRFA. The two prongs of IRFA, government sins of commission or omission, so to speak, clearly describe the situation in Pakistan.

After the assassinations of Taseer and Bhatti, the Pakistani government has not only avoided, but has run away from, any serious efforts to reform the blasphemy law or to prevent further attacks. A CPC designation would help to change the political calculations of Islamabad and encourage the Pakistanis to move forward, not backward. The increase in violent religious extremism threatens all Pakistanis, particularly women and religious minorities, but also the majority faith community. Acts of violence and the repressive laws have fostered a culture of vigilante violence, which is destabilizing Pakistan, with dangerous implications for our and their national security, let alone human rights protections.

Because we recognize that Pakistan is critical to the United States on a number of levels, we urge you to designate Pakistan a CPC. But since we also realize that this designation, by itself, could merely aggravate our deteriorating relations, we urge you to stress to the Pakistani authorities the value of advancing religious freedom in order to undermine extremism and the culture of violence. The negative CPC designation should be supplemented with positive foreign policy actions that assist in the development of legal, educational and cultural institutions and procedures that can change state and societal behavior in Pakistan.

Sincerely,

Ali Al-Ahmed
Director
Institute for Gulf Affairs

Zainab Al-Suwaij
Executive Director
American Islamic Congress

Raimundo C. Barreto Jr., Ph.D.
Director, Freedom and Justice
Baptist World Alliance

Jennifer Bryson
Director, Islam and Civil Society Project
The Witherspoon Institute

Ann Buwalda, Esq.
Executive Director
Jubilee Campaign, USA

Galen Carey
Vice President, Government Relations
National Association of Evangelicals

Sajid Christopher
Executive Director
Human Friends Organization International

Thomas F. Farr
Visiting Associate Professor, Walsh School of Foreign Service
Senior Fellow, Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs
Former Director, Office of International Religious Freedom, State Department

Bob Fu
Founder and President
China Aid Association

Joseph K. Grieboski
Founder and Chairman of the Board
THE INSTITUTE on Religion and Public Policy

Dr. David P. Gushee
Chairman of the Board
The New Evangelical Partnership for the Common Good

Daniel Hoffman
Advocacy & Development Director
Middle East Concern

Dr. Joel C. Hunter
Senior Pastor
Northland – A Church Distributed

M. Zuhdi Jasser, M.D.
President
American Islamic Forum for Democracy

David J. Kramer
Executive Director
Freedom House

Dwayne Leslie, Esq.
Deputy Secretary-General
International Religious Liberty Association

Paul Marshall
Senior Fellow
Center for Religious Freedom
Hudson Institute

Steven D. Martin
Executive Director
The New Evangelical Partnership for the Common Good

Greg Mitchell
President
The Mitchell Firm

David Neff
Editor in Chief & Vice President
Christianity Today Media Group

Alim Seytoff
President
Uyghur American Association

Suhag A. Shukla, Esq.
Managing Director/Legal Counsel
Hindu American Foundation

Michael Stoddard Ph.D.
Visiting Fellow, Greyfriars Hall, Oxford University
Visiting Fellow, The Oxford Institute on International Law & Justice Lecturer

Rev. Susan Taylor
President
Church of Scientology

Dr. Geoff Tunnicliffe
CEO/General Secretary
World Evangelical Alliance

UNITED SIKHS

Jim Winkler
General Secretary
General Board of Church and Society
The United Methodist Church

CC: Dr. Suzan Johnson Cook, Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom
William Burns, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs
Maria Otero, Under Secretary of State for Democracy and Global Affairs
Michael Posner, Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor
Marc Grossman, Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan