

Policy Brief

Towards a shared voice and destiny

Executive Summary: Hate speech is a major cause of the persecution of religious minorities in Pakistan. Efforts to counter hate speech and promote tolerance are crucial for safeguarding the rights of minorities in Pakistan. It requires a comprehensive approach that includes legal measures, public awareness campaigns, education on diversity and respect, and fostering interfaith dialogue to promote understanding and peaceful coexistence among different communities.

PAKISTAN is a Muslim-majority country. According to the country's census done in 2017, Muslims account for about 96.47 percent of Pakistan's 207.68 million population, Hindus 1.73 percent, Christians about 1.27 percent, the Ahmadis about 0.09 percent, scheduled caste 0.41 percent and others number only 0.02 percent¹. Religious minorities claim the country's long-delayed census, released by the government in May 2021, appears to have undercounted them².

The Constitution of Pakistan guarantees freedom of religion and professes equal rights for all citizens regardless of their faith^{3, 4, 5, 6}. Pakistan is also a signatory to several international conventions⁷ that deal with human rights including the ones related to the rights of people from minority faiths, and is obligated to act under them.

The positives:

In recent years, efforts have been made to address the challenges faced by religious minorities in Pakistan. For example, the government has taken steps to protect and preserve religious sites belonging to minority

¹ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1624375>

² https://www.voanews.com/a/extremism-watch_pakistans-religious-minorities-say-they-were-undercounted-census/6207724.html

³ The Constitution of Pakistan:

⁴ Freedom to profess religion and to manage religious institutions. Subject to law, public order and morality:- (a) every citizen shall have the right to profess, practice and propagate his religion; and (b) every religious denomination and every sect thereof shall have the right to establish, maintain and manage its religious institutions.

⁵ Safeguard against taxation for purposes of any particular religion. No person shall be compelled to pay any special tax the proceeds of which are to be spent on the propagation or maintenance of any religion other than his own.

⁶ Safeguards as to educational institutions in respect of religion, etc. (1) No person attending any educational institution shall be required to receive religious instruction, or take part in any religious ceremony, or attend religious worship, if such instruction, ceremony or worship relates to a religion other than his own. (2) In respect of any religious institution, there shall be no discrimination against any community in the granting of exemption or concession in relation to taxation. (3) Subject to law: (a) no religious community or denomination shall be prevented from providing religious instruction for pupils of that community or denomination in any educational institution maintained wholly by that community or denomination; and (b) no citizen shall be denied admission to any educational institution receiving aid from public revenues on the ground only of race, religion, caste or place of birth. (4) Nothing in this Article shall prevent any public authority from making provision for the advancement of any socially or educationally backward class of citizens.

⁷ These are International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR); the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR); the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC); the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities; the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief; and the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity.

communities and has passed bills which formally recognize Hindu and Sikh marriages in law for the first time. The Islamabad administration has this year notified the rules for Hindu Marriage Act 2017 more than five years after its passage, allowing the members of the minority community to solemnize their marriage in line with established rituals.

A bill to govern marriage and divorce in Christians has been on the law ministry anvil for the last several years before it could show up in the parliament and amend 140-year-old Christian personal laws. The proposed Christian Marriage and Divorce Act, if passed by the parliament, will replace the Christian Divorce Act of 1869, and the Christian Marriage Act of 1872, the antiquity of which has made them inconsistent with contemporary social needs⁸.

The Supreme Court of Pakistan's 2014 judgment, known as the Justice Jilani Judgment, directed the government of Pakistan to establish a national human rights institution for religious minorities, alongside key directives including the creation of a federal government task force for religious tolerance, development of curricula for religious and social tolerance, measures to discourage online hate speech, the⁹ establishment of a national council for minorities, creation of a special police force to protect places of worship for minorities, implementation of quota reservations for religious minorities in government services, prompt action by law enforcement agencies in cases of violations of minority rights, and the maintenance of an open file by a three-member Supreme Court bench to ensure effective implementation and address complaints regarding minority rights violations.

Later, in 2019, the court set up a One-Man Commission (OMC) comprising former police chief Dr. Shoaib Suddle to monitor the judgment's implementation. In February 2022, the Sindh Police announced the creation of a new unit, the Special Protection Force for Minorities, with a mandate to protect churches, temples, and gurdwaras across the province. The unit had an authorized strength of 5,000 officers and began hiring 2,800 officers from Karachi. In June, Suddle reported that Sindh had recruited 1,200 officers for the unit. He also reported that Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were working to raise similar units, but that Balochistan had not yet complied with Suddle's mandate to create such a unit. In a December 30 letter, the One-Man Commission directed all the government authorities of Pakistan to put a lid on religion-based discrimination in offices, jobs and workplaces across the country.

Giving reference to the advertisements for the Christian community for recruitment of sanitary workers, the One-Man Commission in its letter wrote that such advertisements are a straight violation of the Constitution of Pakistan, as Articles 18, 25 and 27 demand equality of all citizens in jobs and occupations, freedom of trade and prohibits recruitment or hiring on the basis of religion, caste or sex. "It is required that the referred advertisements be immediately withdrawn and stern instructions on the subject be issued to all divisions/departments/autonomous organizations/attached departments, etc. to ensure stoppage of faith-based discriminatory practices for good".¹⁰

The National Commission for Minorities was formed under the aegis of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony in May 2020. For the last eight years, Pakistan has also been implementing a

⁸ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1242277/amendments-christian-marriage-laws>

⁹ <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/559e57644.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://e.thenews.com.pk/detail?id=41183>

National Action Plan¹¹ that goes well beyond the usual antiterrorist military operations. Among other measures, the plan calls for cracking down on hate speech and attacks on religious minorities and for regulating Islamic seminaries.

In 2009, the government reserved 5 percent of jobs for religious minorities in federal and provincial governments, semi-autonomous bodies, public corporations and public companies. In January this year, the Supreme Court of Pakistan directed all the provincial governments to ensure that the employment quota of minorities is maintained at all levels and to strictly avoid discriminatory and demeaning advertisements flouting the dignity and self-respect of minorities¹².

A three-judge bench judgment, authored by Justice Syed Mansoor Ali Shah, said that to safeguard the rights of minorities and persons with disabilities and to provide equality of status and opportunities, the State has to endeavour to bridge the gap and ensure that the differently-abled persons and the non-Muslim minority in the country get to enjoy their fundamental rights under the Constitution with the same fervour and force as enjoyed by the Muslim majority and majority of persons with fuller abilities. Besides scholarships, a 2 percent quota is reserved in higher educational institutions' enrollment for students from minority faiths. Such steps, minorities' rights activists say, will lead to the evolvement of an inclusive and pluralistic society.

During a May 11, 2023, event commemorating the golden jubilee of the passage of Pakistan's constitution, it was heartening to witness Harris Khalique, the Secretary-General of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), representing the civil society and passionately advocating for the rights of minorities. Addressing the National Assembly at a conference on the constitution, Khalique urged doing away with the legislation discriminating against the country's minorities and advised the authorities not to undercount vulnerable populations in the census.¹³

The National Lobbying Delegation (NLD), a highly influential advocacy group in Pakistan, has been at the forefront of safeguarding the rights of religious minorities since 2012. Comprised of 24 members, including political leaders, activists, religious figures, academics, journalists, and social workers from across the country, the delegation has achieved successes such as the implementation of education and job quotas for minorities and the enactment of the Hindu Marriage Law. The NLD also continues to lobby for legislative measures and the effective implementation of personal laws for Hindus, Christians, and Sikhs, further advancing the rights of religious minorities in Pakistan.^{14 15}

The challenges:

However, religious minorities have faced challenges and discrimination in various aspects of life. Members of the minority faiths have reported instances of social, economic, and political marginalization, as well as occasional violence and persecution. They have faced restrictions on practicing their faith freely and

¹¹ <https://nacta.gov.pk/nap-2014/>

¹² <https://www.brecorder.com/news/40221525>

¹³ https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCWYRU64Tlo-RPHPDxkXLUCw?view_as=subscriber

¹⁴ <https://voicepk.net/2023/04/forum-calls-for-5-party-tickets-for-minorities-in-general-elections/>

¹⁵ <https://www.ucanews.com/news/lobbying-for-minorities-in-pakistan/93912>

have encountered discrimination in areas like employment, education, and representation in government.

Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Baluchistan provinces are yet to form rules for implementation of the Hindu Marriage Act, 2017, which observers say reeks of 'our institutionalised prejudice. (Sindh has its own law, the Sindh Hindu Marriage Act, which also applies to Sikh marriages.) However, "the majority of women from a frozen-out community in Pakistan continue to live without official documentation, consent and inheritance, and submit to underage marriage as well as social and domestic violence," Dawn says in its May 8, 2023 editorial¹⁶ referring to the slow and sketchy implementation of Hindu marriage law¹⁷. The Punjab Sikh Anand Karaj Marriage Act allows local government officials in the Punjab province to register marriages between a Sikh man and Sikh woman solemnized by a Sikh Anand Karaj marriage registrar. But its rules are yet to be defined¹⁸.

The National Commission for Minorities, as a non-statutory body, has continued to receive criticism by human rights defenders for not reflecting the spirit of the Jilani judgment, which envisaged an autonomous national human rights institution with statutory powers and national jurisdiction¹⁹. And observers have seen policy gaps in the implementation of the National Action Plan. Paigham-i-Pakistan, a consensus-based policy document²⁰, has converged different religious schools of thought on calling violence and hatred in the name of religion an intolerable vice that deserves severe action from the state. "The platform has done some work on interfaith harmony, but it has been unable to create an atmosphere that encourages debate and dialogue on issues related to minorities and faith, such as Ahmadis. The psychology of "us" (Muslims) versus "others" is entrenched and hardly solved."²¹

In January this year, rights experts from the United Nations deplored abductions, forced marriages and conversions of girls from Pakistan's religious minorities, urging the government to swiftly halt such practices.²²

On October 12, 2021, a bill that offered safeguards against forced conversions was rejected by a parliamentary committee after the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Council of Islamic Ideology opposed it. Lal Chand Malhi, a minority member of parliament, decried the decision as one that would 'make life a living hell for minorities in the country'. At a meeting, the Council had earlier reviewed the draft bill and objected to several clauses, including the minimum age of conversion.²³ The religious

¹⁶ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1751546>

¹⁷ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1632510>

¹⁸ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2247045/two-years-sikh-marriage-act-still-awaits-implementation>

¹⁹ In a press release issued on 9 May 2020, HRCP said it had 'strong reservations' concerning the formation of the commission 'through a Cabinet decision based on a summary moved by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony', adding that 'the proposed composition smacks of partisanship and, above all, as a non-statutory body, the commission is no substitute for the national council for minorities' rights envisioned by the Supreme Court's historic Tasadduq Jilani judgment of 2014.

²⁰ <https://gcwus.edu.pk/wp-content/uploads/Paigham-e-Pakistan.pdf>

²¹ <https://www.arabnews.pk/node/1932791> (Policy gaps in the implementation of Pakistan's National Action Plan by DURDANA NAJAM)

²² <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/1/18/pakistan-urged-to-act-against-forced-child-marriages-conversions>

²³ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1651813#:~:text=Pakistan%20Opinion%20Business>

,Parliamentary%20panel%20rejects%20anti%20forced%20conversion,amid%20protest%20by%20minorities'%20lawmakers&text=A%20parliamentary%20committee%20on%20Wednesday,minority%20communities%20protested%20the%20decision.

minorities and activists on Twitter had criticized the CII for inviting Mian Mithu, a cleric known for his alleged involvement in forced Hindu conversions, for discussion over the draft^{24 25}.

In March last year, a teenage Hindu girl Pooja Kumari was killed in Rohri town in Sukkur district of Sindh after she resisted abduction for alleged forced marriage and conversion. She stitched traditional garments at their home.²⁶ The HRCP raised ‘alarm’ over religious freedom in a report released in February 2023. In the report titled ‘A Breach of Faith: Freedom of Religion or Belief’ in 2021-22²⁷, the Commission said incidents of the country’s religious minorities facing violence and persecution remained consistent between July 2021 and June 2022. Most of the discrimination, persecution and violence stems from hate speech, which Pakistan has for decades been battling the effects of, particularly against religious minorities.

What is hate speech?

In common language, “hate speech” refers to offensive discourse targeting a group or an individual based on inherent characteristics (such as race, religion or gender) and that may threaten social peace.

To provide a unified framework for the United Nations to address the issue globally, the UN Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech²⁸ defines hate speech as...“any kind of communication in speech, writing or behaviour, that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a person or a group on the basis of who they are, in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender or other identity factor.”

Hate speech can be conveyed through any form of expression, including images, cartoons, memes, objects, gestures and symbols and it can be disseminated offline or online. Hate speech is discriminatory (biased, bigoted or intolerant) or pejorative (prejudiced, contemptuous or demeaning) of an individual or group. Hate speech calls out real or perceived “identity factors” of an individual or a group, including: “religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender,” but also characteristics such as language, economic or social origin, disability, health status, or sexual orientation, among many others.

Unlike in traditional media, online hate speech can be produced and shared easily, at low cost and anonymously. It has the potential to reach a global and diverse audience in real-time. The relative permanence of hateful online content is also problematic, as it can resurface and regain popularity over time.

Hate speech drives violence:

Ignited by hate speech, violence has continued to spiral, and numerous lives have been destroyed. For instance, in a press statement on April 2, 2023, Bishop Dr Azad Marshall, the Moderator Bishop of the Anglican Church of Pakistan condemned the targeted killings of some members of minority communities

²⁴ <https://www.nation.com.pk/E-Paper/islamabad/2021-09-25/page-12/detail-3>

²⁵ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1725577>

²⁶ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/3/31/pakistan-hindu-girls-killing-reignites-forced-conversion-fears>

²⁷ <https://hrqp-web.org/hrqpweb/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/2023-A-breach-of-faith-freedom-of-religion-or-belief-in-2021-22.pdf>

²⁸ https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/advising-and-mobilizing/Action_plan_on_hate_speech_EN.pdf

as “against the fundamental principles of humanity” and blamed it on hate speech²⁹. “We call on the government to take strong action against Maulana Abdul Akbar Chitrali of the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) and all others who use hate speech and incite violence against innocent people,” he said.

Chitrali drew the ire of the Christian community for calling the Bible, Torah and Psalms “cancelled scriptures”, while speaking on the floor of the National Assembly against the policy of giving additional marks to medical students who can memorize the Quran or the Bible.

“We have also noted with concern how the Speaker of the National Assembly ignored Chitrali's remarks and didn't allow a Christian lawmaker Naveed Aamir Jeeva to counter it. The floor of the House is not meant to demean any religion and we expect the Speaker will take cognizance of this fact and not allow any person to spew hatred against other faiths,” he said. All the lawmakers except Jeeva kept silent as Chitrali spoke unhindered, which observers dubbed as condoning whatever the cleric said. The Speaker didn't order the remarks expunged either despite Jeeva's request.

In recent years, hate speech and incitement to violence have moved into the online space, where its incidence has grown exponentially, and where perpetrators enjoy relative impunity for their actions. Bytes for All, Pakistan (B4A) in its annual Internet Landscape Report 2022³⁰ sheds light on evolving digital environment and human rights issues in Pakistan. It says that in 2022, cases of blasphemy accusations originating from or connected to the digital space remained prevalent, with no meaningful action taken to address the issue. “The online environment remains perilous, with the threat of blasphemy allegations, online campaigning, mob organizing, and subsequent violence, including lynching.”

On June 25, 2023, gunmen shot and killed Manmohan Singh, 35, a member of Pakistan's minority Sikh community in an attack in the northwestern city of Peshawar, police said.³¹ It was the third killing of a Sikh community member this year in Pakistan. Assailants gunned down Sardar Singh in a drive-by shooting in the eastern city of Lahore. In April, gunmen shot and killed Dayal Singh in the northern city of Peshawar. In the same city in May 2022, gunmen killed two members of Sikh community. Ranveer Singh, a representative of Pakistan's minority Sikh community, said Sikhs are feeling insecure as 11 members of their community have been killed in recent years.

The minister for information and religious minorities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa assured Sikhs the culprits will be arrested and there will be steps to protect minorities. Feroze Jamal Shah Kakakhel also announced compensation of 500,000 rupees for Singh's family. Likewise, a Christian man, Kashif Masih, was shot dead by unknown attackers. He was attacked while returning from his job as a cleaner for local authorities. Hindu doctor and eye surgeon Birbal Genani was gunned down in Karachi.

On January 30, 2022, gunmen killed one Christian priest, Rev. William Siraj, 75, and wounded another, priest Naeem Patrick, as they were driving home from Sunday Mass in Peshawar. A third priest in the car was unharmed. No one immediately claimed responsibility for the attack.³²

²⁹ <https://www.nation.com.pk/03-Apr-2023/senior-bishop-condemns-targeted-killings-of-minority-members>

³⁰ <https://bytesforall.pk/sites/default/files/Internet-Landscape-Report%20FINAL-2022.pdf>

³¹ <https://apnews.com/article/pakistan-minorities-targeted-killings-f979dbc74d1ad5077d6fb436b070be48>

³² <https://apnews.com/article/religion-pakistan-taliban-peshawar-f410326e040b2a8873dd6feafe317d26>

Hate speech not only incites individuals to commit acts of violence, but it also severely hampers the ability of law enforcers and judges to effectively control and penalize such crimes. The impact of hate speech reaches far beyond its immediate targets, permeating society and undermining the very foundations of justice and equality.

By fueling hatred and animosity, hate speech directly contributes to a climate of violence, putting the safety and well-being of targeted individuals at risk. When hate speech proliferates within a society, it can create an atmosphere of fear, intimidation, and discrimination, making it difficult for marginalized communities to trust law enforcement agencies or seek justice. Victims of hate crimes may be hesitant to come forward and report incidents, fearing further victimization or believing that their complaints will not be taken seriously. This lack of trust and cooperation impedes the efforts of law enforcers in investigating and prosecuting hate crimes effectively.

Hate speech often targets specific communities or individuals, and when cases involving hate crimes are brought before judges, the prejudiced beliefs propagated by hate speech may cloud their judgment and impartiality. It becomes challenging for judges to make fair decisions when their objectivity is compromised by the pervasive influence of hate speech. This can lead to lenient sentences or even the dismissal of cases, undermining the deterrence and punishment that should accompany hate crimes.

By acknowledging the detrimental impact it has on society as a whole, we can work towards creating a more inclusive and just environment, where the incitement of violence is not tolerated, and where the ability to control and punish hate crimes is effectively upheld. We need to know the sources of hate speech before we nip it.

Sources of hate speech:

Hate speech targeting minorities in Pakistan takes various forms and is disseminated through multiple channels. Here are some common ways in which hate speech is used to target minorities:

Religious Rhetoric: Hate speech often utilizes religious rhetoric to incite hatred and intolerance towards minority religious groups. Members of certain pressure groups propagate narratives that demonize and dehumanize religious minorities, portraying them as enemies of Islam or promoting conspiracy theories against them.

Social Media and Online Platforms: With the rise of social media, online platforms have become significant spaces for hate speech. Members of certain pressure groups use platforms like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, or messaging apps to spread hate speech targeting minorities. Such content includes derogatory remarks, false information, and incitement to violence.

Public Gatherings and Protests: Hate speech against minorities is also propagated through public gatherings, rallies, or protests organized by certain pressure groups. Speakers at these events use inflammatory language, make false accusations, or call for discriminatory actions against minority communities. For instance, in November 2014, a pregnant Christian woman and her husband were thrown into a brick kiln in a village near Kot Radha Kishan, in Kasur. They were accused of desecrating the Holy Quran and around 1,500 people from neighboring villages gathered to beat and kill them.

Hate speech in Print and Electronic Media: Certain sections of the print and electronic media in Pakistan have been known to perpetuate hate speech against minority groups. Inflammatory articles, TV talk shows, or radio programs vilify and stereotype minorities, reinforcing negative perceptions and fostering an environment of intolerance. For instance, Luqman Ahad Shehzad, a member of the Ahmadiyya community was shot dead in Gujranwala after a cleric denounced the Ahmadiyya community on a TV show in December 2014. The cleric termed Ahmadis as “enemy of Pakistan” during the show. In another TV talk show in 2008, anti-Ahmadi hate speech led to the murder of two Ahmadis.

Blasphemy Accusations: Blasphemy laws in Pakistan have sometimes been misused to target individuals from minority faiths. False accusations of blasphemy lead to hate speech campaigns, often fueled by certain pressure groups, which further incite violence and discrimination against the accused and their community. Even the slightest suggestion of an insult to religion can supercharge protests and incite lynching.

On December 3, 2021, Piryantha Kumara, a Sri Lankan factory manager in Pakistan was beaten to death and his body set ablaze by a mob in Sialkot in an incident local media reported was linked to alleged act of blasphemy³³. On April 18, 2022, a court sentenced six men to death in a mass trial. The Anti-Terrorism Court in Lahore, set up inside a high-security prison, also gave life sentences to nine people, five years' jail to one, and two-year sentences to 72³⁴.

On April 27, Muslim nurses occupied a chapel used for Sunday services at the Punjab Institute for Mental Health in Lahore after they accused a Christian nurse of committing blasphemy by sending an "objectionable" video to a nurses' unofficial WhatsApp group.³⁵ The dispute went on for almost two weeks after which a 15-member negotiating team brokered an agreement with the help of senior doctors and Father James Chaman. The two parties agreed that there would be no further statements issued from and the parties won't file any further complaints against each other.

On April 10, 2021, police in Faisalabad registered a blasphemy complaint against two female Christian nurses for removing a sticker that contained religious injunctions after scores of staffers staged a demonstration to demand legal action against them. Critics say such charges often are motivated by personal vendetta or religious hatred.³⁶ Witnesses said an angry protester assaulted one of the nurses, Mariyum Lal, with a knife and injured her before riot police arrived at the facility to take both the women into “protective custody” and get them out of the hospital building.

On May 16 this year, two school girls, including a 9-year-old, were killed and five others hurt when a police constable opened fire at a missionary Catholic school in Swat Valley in the northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. The school, managed by the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin in Sangota was targeted when students were getting ready to leave the school in a van.

Textbooks and Educational Material: In some cases, educational material, including textbooks, contain discriminatory or biased content against minority religious groups. Such material perpetuates

³³ <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/sri-lankan-manager-killed-by-mob-workers-pakistan-garment-factory-2021-12-03/>

³⁴ <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/pakistani-court-sentences-seven-men-death-lynching-sri-lankan-prosecutor-2022-04-18/>

³⁵ <https://voicepk.net/2021/05/fear-persists-in-lahore-hospital-despite-averting-communal-clash/>

³⁶ https://www.voanews.com/a/south-central-asia_two-christian-nurses-pakistan-accused-blasphemy/6204404.html

stereotypes, reinforces prejudices, and contributes to a hostile environment for minorities in educational settings.

Hate speech is not representative of the views of the entire population of Pakistan. Efforts have been made by the Pakistani government, civil society organizations, and human rights activists to address hate speech and protect minority communities. Legal frameworks are in place to combat hate speech, and initiatives promoting interfaith dialogue and religious tolerance have been undertaken. However, challenges persist.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Tackling hate speech, discrimination, and violence against minority faiths requires a multi-faceted approach that involves legal, educational, social, and cultural measures. While the following recommendations have been effective in addressing similar issues in various contexts, it is important to adapt them to the specific circumstances and needs of Pakistan:

Increasing political participation and representation of minorities:

- Increase reserved seats in legislative bodies based on population and improve electoral processes to address socioeconomic barriers.
- Amend the Constitution for more minority representation and dual voting rights and empower minority representatives through merit-based selection.
- Conduct outreach campaigns, engage with civil society and religious leaders, and raise awareness about political rights and diverse representation and Foster collaboration and dialogue, and monitor progress for accountability.

Strengthening legal framework:

- Enforce existing laws against hate speech and incitement to violence, ensuring strict penalties for offenders. Develop comprehensive legislation that specifically addresses hate crimes and discrimination, including provisions for protecting religious minorities.
- Regulate Friday sermons and develop a code of conduct that ensures that our religious institutions are not abused or made into hotbeds of inciting hatred is crucial to the welfare of Pakistan³⁷.
- Improve the implementation of laws and enhance the capacity of law enforcement agencies to investigate and prosecute cases of hate speech and violence.
- Through an act of parliament, make the National Commission for Minorities an autonomous national human rights institution with statutory powers and jurisdiction at the national level, aligning with the principles outlined in the Jilani judgment.

Promoting interfaith dialogue and understanding:

- Encourage and facilitate interfaith dialogues, forums, and events to foster understanding, respect, and harmony among different religious communities.
- Support initiatives that promote tolerance, respect, and cooperation among religious groups, such as interfaith workshops, seminars, and cultural exchanges.

³⁷ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1398019>

- Encourage religious leaders to promote messages of social cohesion and respect for diversity within their respective communities.

Education and awareness:

- Integrate teachings on religious tolerance, diversity, and respect for human rights into the national curriculum at all educational levels.
- Conduct awareness campaigns targeting schools, colleges, universities, and public to promote tolerance, inclusivity, and understanding of different faiths.
- Encourage the inclusion of diverse perspectives and voices in educational materials and textbooks to counter biased narratives and stereotypes.

Media and social media regulation:

- Develop guidelines and standards for media professionals and journalists to promote responsible reporting, ethical coverage, and avoid sensationalism or hate speech.
- Collaborate with social media platforms to monitor and counter hate speech and extremist content, with a focus on proactive measures, reporting mechanisms, and content moderation.
- Promote digital literacy and critical thinking skills to help individuals navigate online platforms responsibly and identify and counter hate speech.

Empowering minority communities:

- Implement quotas, such as a 5% quota in public jobs and a 2% quota in higher education admissions, to provide opportunities for underrepresented communities. This challenges systemic barriers, reduces grievances, and diminishes the fuel for hate speech. Increasing the presence of individuals from minority communities in public institutions fosters inclusivity, promotes empathy, breaks down stereotypes, and counters prejudice. This leads to social harmony, a sense of shared destiny, and collective progress, reducing divisive narratives and emphasizing unity and inclusivity. Overall, it contributes to the reduction of hate speech.
- Ensure the active participation and representation of minority communities in decision-making processes, policy formulation, and governance structures.
- Provide legal aid, support, and protection to victims of hate crimes and discrimination, ensuring their access to justice and rehabilitation.
- Promote economic opportunities, educational scholarships, and vocational training programs for minority communities to enhance their socio-economic well-being and empower them.

Strengthening international partnerships:

- Seek international cooperation and support from organizations and governments experienced in addressing hate speech, discrimination, and violence against religious minorities.
- Learn from best practices and experiences of other countries in countering hate speech and fostering social cohesion.
- These recommendations are not exhaustive, and a comprehensive strategy should involve collaboration between the government, civil society organizations, religious leaders, and communities themselves. It is essential to address the root causes of hate speech and

discrimination while promoting an inclusive and pluralistic society that values diversity and protects the rights of all its citizens.