

# QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

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*IF DEMOCRACY IS NOT ESTABLISHED AT THE GRASSROOTS LEVEL, PEOPLE WILL CONTINUE TO SUFFER. A TRUE, GENUINE, AND PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY WHERE COMMON PEOPLE HAVE A SAY AND CONTRIBUTION IN POLICYMAKING.*

DR. FAROOQ SATTAR



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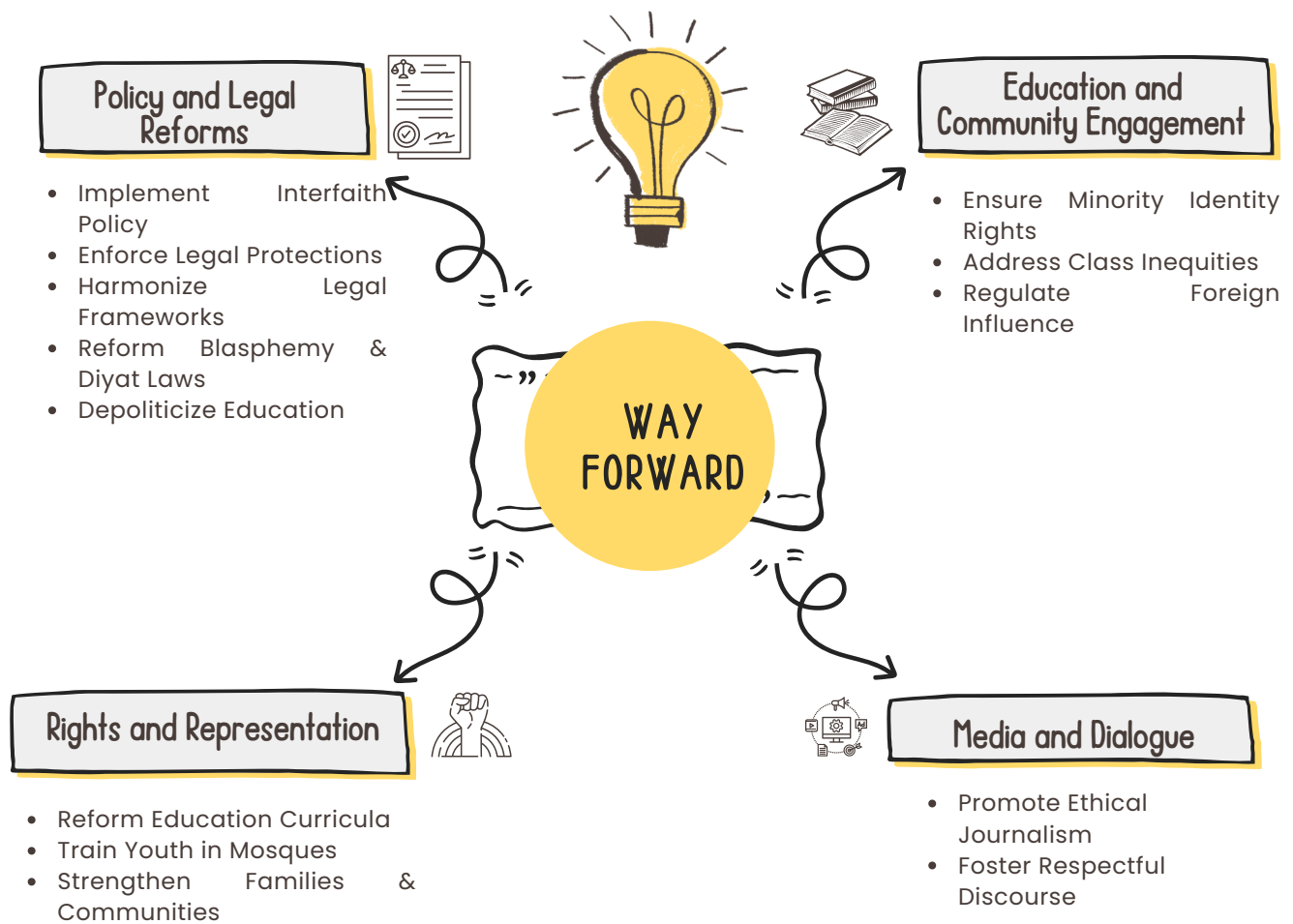
# **BUILDING BRIDGES: FOSTERING TOLERANCE AND INCLUSIVITY AMONG YOUTH**

## **A STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION ON TOLERANCE & INCLUSIVITY**

Freedom of religion or belief in Pakistan remains under serious threat, with religious minorities facing growing discrimination, violence, and the continued misuse of blasphemy laws. Despite some security at religious sites, targeted attacks persist, highlighting the need for more effective and comprehensive measures. Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) organized a stakeholder consultation in Karachi under its initiative Building Bridges: A Stakeholder Consultation on Tolerance and Inclusivity to identify challenges and develop strategies to mitigate the issue. The event brought together lawmakers, politicians, academics, civil society members, religious leaders, journalists, and government representatives to promote open dialogue, counter divisive narratives, and advance a more inclusive and tolerant society in Pakistan. The recommended approach is given below

### **Way Forward:**

- **Implement and Monitor Policy on Interfaith Harmony:** Ensure the effective implementation of the February 2025 Human Rights Department policy through clear monitoring mechanisms and regular evaluations. Strengthen inter-departmental coordination and prioritize capacity-building workshops across all relevant government bodies.
- **Trainings of Youth in Mosques and Community Centers:** Institutionalize the role of mosques and local community centers as inclusive platforms for dialogue, education, and interfaith engagement.
- **Encourage training of religious leaders in conflict resolution and peacebuilding.**
- **Revise and Reform Education System:** Overhaul curricula at all levels to integrate values of tolerance, pluralism, and critical thinking. Remove biased content to promote understanding and respect among faiths.
- **Strengthen Family and Community Foundations:** Launch awareness campaigns and parenting programs focused on character-building and fostering inclusive values within households.
- **Enforce Legal Protections and Close Loopholes:** Introduce comprehensive legal reforms to address forced conversions, child marriage, misuse of blasphemy laws, and mob violence. Close gaps in existing laws and ensure timely, impartial enforcement through a rights-based approach.
- **Harmonize Legal Frameworks:** Resolve contradictions between civil and religious legal systems to ensure clarity and protect minority rights, especially in personal law matters such as marriage and inheritance.
- **Reform and Regulate Diyat and Blasphemy Laws:** Amend laws to prevent misuse for personal or political purposes.
- **Strengthen procedural safeguards and revive grassroots reconciliation forums like Union Council Maslihati/advisory Committees.**
- **Address Class-Based Inequities:** Promote accountability and legal transparency to limit elite influence in judicial outcomes. Foster inclusive governance that represents all socio-economic groups.



*"It is a shared commitment to build a more inclusive Pakistan. We must ensure that our laws and mechanisms guarantee religious freedom".*

Agha Fakhur Hussain, director of the Human Rights Department of the Sindh Government

- **Promote Ethical Journalism and Objective Research:** Encourage academic institutions and media outlets to undertake unbiased research and promote balanced reporting that counters hate speech and extremist narratives.
- **Ensure Identity Rights for Minorities:** Simplify and facilitate NADRA registration processes for minority communities to guarantee access to citizenship rights and public services.
- **Regulate Foreign Influence and Promote Institutional Inclusion:** Monitor and manage foreign funding to prevent radicalization, while transforming institutions into inclusive spaces that represent and serve all citizens equally.
- **Depoliticize Education and Undo Islamization Effects:** Remove ideological bias from compulsory education subjects and restore secular, inclusive content in line with the constitutional vision of equality.
- **Foster Respectful Public Discourse:** Promote initiatives for interfaith dialogue and public awareness campaigns that challenge misinformation and encourage empathy, respectful disagreement, and coexistence.



## BUILDING BRIDGES: FOSTERING INCLUSIVITY & TOLERANCE AMONG YOUTH

PIPS held national workshops in Quetta, Islamabad, and Karachi to promote tolerance, inclusivity, and dialogue among youth and educators.



Research Officer PIPS Hina Khaliq Taj stressed the importance of gender equality and inclusive policies for a balanced society.



President PIPS Muhammad Amir Rana asserted that inclusivity starts at home and empowers all groups.



Human Rights Attorney & Political Activist Jalila Haider observed that tolerance grows through mutual respect and understanding, while social media often amplifies division, misinformation, and hate.



Poet and academic Ali Baba Taj, and Head of Department of Social Sciences at BUITEMS, Dr. Aurangzaib Khan Nasar, discussed the role of universities in promoting tolerance, peace, and harmony.



A panel discussion on the Constitution of Pakistan and national identity ft. Dr. Mir Sadaat Baloch Pro VC University of Makran, senior journalists Shahzada Zulfiqar and Saleem Shahid, & Yar Jan Badini (Editor-in-Chief, Balochistan Today).



A panel on "Socio-Religious Cohesion in Light of Paigham-e-Pakistan" featured religious scholar Allama Akbar Hussain Zahidi, JI Deputy General Secretary, Maulana Abdul Haq Hashmi, and senior journalist Shahzada Zulfiqar, moderated by PIPS President Muhammad Amir Rana.





Former Chairman Council of Islamic Ideology Dr Khalid Masud urged shared values and global thinking.



Journalist and founding editor The Rise News Veengas urged action against forced conversions.



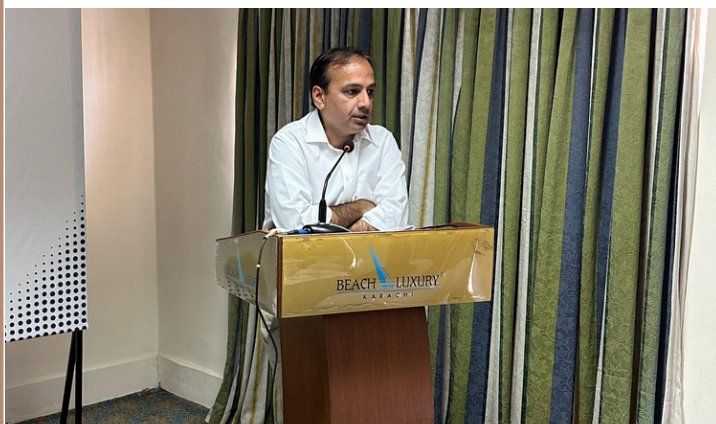
A thoughtful panel on diversity and acceptance with Former Chairman CII Dr. Khalid Masud, Scholar and academic Dr. Syed Jaffar Ahmed, and Executive Director, IRISS Mujtaba Rathore.



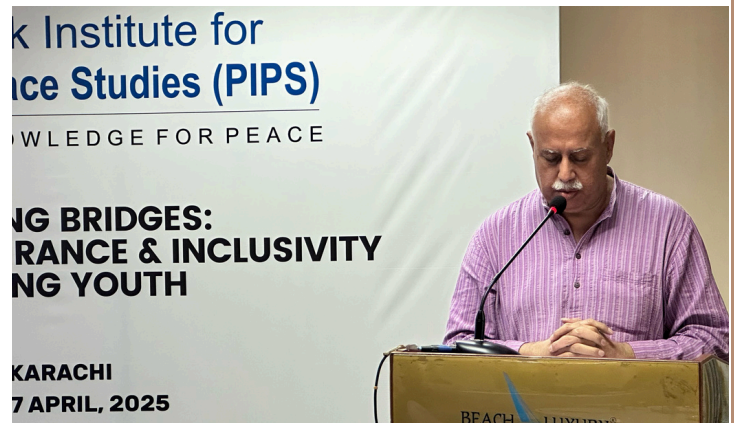
Senior Journalist Ghazi Salahuddin emphasized youth's vital role in embracing diverse views, promoting activism, and fostering societal change through dialogue, reading, and meaningful engagement.

*"There is a need to change the syllabus as well as the mindset of teachers to address the problem of extremism and intolerance".*

Scholar and academic Dr Syed Jaffar Ahmed



Senior Journalist Imran Mukhtar explained trichotomy of power and constitutional amendments



Columnist & Journalist WusatUllah Khan warned fake news thrives without media freedom.





Evaluation Expert & Education Researcher Zeeba Hashmi urged reforms for inclusive and non-discriminatory education.



PIPS President Muhammad Amir Rana distributed certificates at the closing ceremony.



Saeed Ullah Marwat, Bureau Chief Geo News D.I. Khan, emphasized the power of words, stressing that "No means No."



Participants in Islamabad took part in the question-and-answer session with keen interest.



Islamabad workshop concluded on a promising note with active youth engagement.



Students from madrassa fully engaged in the dialogues and discussion



Participants actively listening to engaging discussions on diversity, acceptance, tolerance and inclusivity.

*"We need to promote and hold deliberations to examine any problem to come to some common grounds".*

Dr Khalid Masud, Former Chairman CII, & member of the Shariat Appellate Bench



The events on diversity, tolerance, and inclusivity in Quetta, Karachi, and Islamabad concluded on a promising note, with hopeful dialogue and strong commitments to continued progress.



## BUILDING BRIDGES: A STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION ON TOLERANCE AND INCLUSIVITY

KARACHI, LAHORE, PESHAWAR



MNA MQM, Dr. Muhammad Farooq Sattar called for political tolerance and reforms based on Quaid-e-Azam's vision.



MPA MQM, Farah Sohail called for reforms and dialogue to promote tolerance from home to classrooms.



Director Human Rights DEPT Sindh, Agha Fakhar Hussain linked foreign funding to radicalization and urged inclusive institutions.

*"There is a need to sensitize parents and promote interfaith celebration and respectful dialogue across differing views."* Farah Sohail



Deputy Director, Jamia Banoria Aalimia, Khi Mufti Hussain called for unity through mosques, dialogue, and Paigham-e-Pakistan's message of peace.



Senior Journalist, Editor The Rise News, Veengas highlighted poor legal protection for Hindu girls and linked forced conversions to shrine politics.



Former MPA PPP, Shamin Mumtaz flagged child marriage, blasphemy law misuse, and legal gaps, urging local reforms.





President Pakistan Hindu Council, Parshotam Ramini flagged blasphemy law misuse and discrimination as key challenges for Hindus.



Former MPA, MQM, Mangla Sharma linked rising hate to unchecked intolerance, urging action to protect minorities.



CEO-Pakistan Legal United Society (PLUS) Altaf Hussain Khoso cited the Dua Zehra case to show how religious bias and public ignorance hinder justice.

*"NADRA's refusal to issue CNICs to Hindus whose ancestors are not registered is a serious concern that denies individuals their basic identity and rights as citizens." Parshotam Ramini*



Research Officer, Human Rights Dept, Sindh Nazia Naz highlighted Sindh's 2025 interfaith policy.



Senior Policy Officer, Embassy of the Netherlands, Ahmed Ali attentively listening to the consultation speakers.



Deputy Head of Mission, Embassy of Netherlands, Hajo Provo Kluit attentively listening to the speakers.





Mphil Student & Researcher Nuzhat Bashir highlighted the need for impartial research and a responsible media to promote social harmony.



Executive Director, IRISS Mujtaba Rathore noted that extremism on all sides stems from a lack of understanding and empathy.



Human Rights Activist, Dr. Sorath Sindhu calls for youth reforms, informed religious education, and legal action against forced conversions.

"The real issue lies with the Ashrafiya, the elite class, which manipulates the judicial system to exploit the lower and middle classes."  
Allama Aqeel Anjum



Human Rights and Peace Advocate, Marvi Awan urged collective action and accountability to combat forced conversions and mob violence.



Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences, Sohail University Prof. Dr. Syed Jaffar Ahmed called for curriculum reforms and depoliticization to counter bias and promote inclusiveness.



Chairperson PEMRA, Council of Complaints, Dr. Lubna Zaheer noted that intolerance is rooted in society and affects both minorities and majorities alike.





Senior Producer at GEO News, Majid Siddique Nizami, lamented the steady erosion of meaningful conversational etiquette in an era dominated by instant likes and digital approval.



Pakistan Human Rights Defender Tanveer Jahan advocated for a secular, democratic state free from theocratic influence, ensuring equal rights and inclusion for all.



Executive Director, Centre for Social Justice, Peter Jacob stressed addressing root causes of intolerance and flagged constitutional interpretation as a key concern.

"Conversions are only legitimate when individuals, especially youth, are educated about all religions otherwise, it's indoctrination, not informed choice."

Dr. Sorath Sindhu



Author and Psychologist, Amjad Tufail stressed the home's role in shaping a child's path toward peace or aggression.



Columnist and Religious Analyst, Zia ul Haq Naqshbandi highlighted Holier-than-thou mindsets fuel double standards.



Founder and Chairperson Centre for Peace & Secular Studies, Diep Saeeda said real change needs dialogue, but bias, censorship, and religious misuse stand in the way.





Assistant Professor Dept of Political Science & Int'l Relations, UMT, Dr. Sadia Kazmi called for teacher training to counter intolerance and address roots of radicalization.



CEO Dignity First & Cyril News, Yousuf Binyamin stressed teaching tolerance and inclusivity to children, especially amid rising intolerance toward minorities.



Chairman Council of Islamic Ideology, Allama Dr. Muhammad Raghieb Hussain Naeemi called for just treatment of all faiths irrespective of their affiliation



Guests speaking about social disharmony and factors responsible at the stakeholder consultation in Peshawar





Dr. Rashid Ahmed, Shiekh Zayed Islamic Centre, University of Peshawar, highlighted policy gaps, rising intolerance, and the need to integrate Paigham-e-Pakistan and technical education.



Saif Ullah Azhari lecturer at Shiekh Zayed Islamic Centre, University of Peshawar, urged adopting Egypt's Family House model to promote interfaith harmony in Pakistan.



"Rational, inclusive policies are key to unity; Pakistan's founding vision can still guide us forward."  
Former Chairman Council of Islamic Ideology Dr. Qibla Ayaz



## ***Stories of Impact: Interview Series, Building Bridges: Fostering Tolerance & Inclusivity among Youth***

### **Kiran Jewraj, Thar**

#### **1. What are some practical ways individuals can contribute to fostering interfaith understanding in their daily lives?**

For me, it starts with genuine curiosity—engaging in open conversations, respecting diverse beliefs, participating in interfaith events, and challenging stereotypes through empathy and education. These are practical steps individuals can take to promote interfaith understanding in their daily lives.

#### **2. How can small acts of kindness and inclusion help build a more harmonious society?**

In my own community and work experience, I've seen how simple gestures can help in building a harmonious society. This includes listening without judgment, inviting others to share their traditions, or speaking up against prejudice. Such actions create ripples of acceptance and empathy, making our communities safer and more inclusive for everyone.

#### **3. What are some challenges in balancing religious freedom with social cohesion, and how can they be navigated?**

It's not always easy, especially when personal beliefs seem to conflict with collective values. However, I believe open dialogue, empathy, and a willingness to understand the "why" behind someone's beliefs can help us move forward together.

#### **4. How can interfaith and community dialogues promote a better understanding of gender inclusivity?**

When people from different backgrounds come together and share lived experiences—especially around gender—it can shift perspectives. These dialogues create safe spaces to explore faith-based and cultural views on gender. They help dismantle biases, build empathy, and promote shared goals of equality and dignity across faith lines.

#### **5. How can cultural exchange programs help bridge gaps between different religious communities?**

Cultural exchange programs offer firsthand exposure to diverse customs and beliefs, helping to dismantle misconceptions. Such exchanges humanize the "other," spark friendships, and lay the groundwork for peaceful coexistence rooted in mutual respect.

#### **6. How did the workshop challenge your existing perceptions about inclusion and interfaith harmony?**

Before the workshop, I thought I was already quite open-minded. But listening to others' realities made me realize I still had blind spots. It helped me unlearn and re-learn what inclusion truly looks like in practice.

#### **7. Were there any moments during the sessions that inspired you or changed the way you think about your role in fostering harmony?**

Yes. During one session, a participant shared a personal story that had changed their life. That moment reminded me that fostering harmony isn't always about grand gestures—it's about showing up, listening, and making space for others. Storytelling is a powerful tool for connection, and each of us can be a bridge for peace.

**"Storytelling is a powerful tool for connection, and each of us can be a bridge for peace."**

**Kiran Jewraj Kumari**



## ABDUL RAFAY JAMALI, HYDERABAD

### **1. What role does media play in shaping perceptions about different faiths, and how can we encourage more positive representations? Can you quote some television program that promoted interfaith harmony and diversity?**

Media plays a pivotal role in shaping perceptions and narratives about different faiths. With the rise of social media, its role has become more significant than ever. Positive representation can be encouraged through inclusive storytelling that reflects the diversity of religious communities. Furthermore, training journalists in religious literacy and cultural sensitivity is a valuable step toward countering religious bias and reducing faith-based animosity. Here i want to quote a book titled as the " The Dignity of Difference by Rabbi Sacks". It is a must read book.

### **2. What strategies can be employed to address misconceptions or stereotypes about different faiths?**

There are several effective strategies that can be employed to address the plethora of stereotypes associated with different faiths. First and foremost, education is key. Integrating inclusive, comparative religious studies into school curricula helps young people understand diverse beliefs in an objective and respectful manner. Interfaith education can also be promoted through public awareness campaigns that highlight common values and enhance dialogue. Secondly, media and advocacy play a crucial role. Encouraging journalists and content creators to avoid sensationalism and instead consult with faith leaders can lead to more balanced and accurate portrayals. By combining these strategies, societies can cultivate empathy, reduce prejudice, and build a culture of mutual respect.

### **3. How can young people take lead in promoting interfaith dialogue and understanding?**

Young people can play a pivotal role in leading interfaith dialogue and promoting understanding. It begins with actively learning about different faiths. Building on this foundation, young individuals can create inclusive spaces for dialogue, discourse, and debate.

This effort can be further enhanced through the strategic use of social media—fact-checking, debunking stereotypes, and combating fake news. Beyond words, it is action that unites us. One effective approach is the formation of youth-oriented social clubs that foster collaboration and shared community initiatives.

### **4. What role can education and awareness play in breaking gender stereotypes and fostering more equitable societies?**

Education and awareness are instrumental in dismantling gender stereotypes and advancing equitable societies. Through diverse and inclusive curricula, the education system can challenge gender stereotypes by highlighting the significant contributions of all genders. Beyond formal education, public awareness campaigns also play a vital role in addressing and dismantling gender bias. Over time, these efforts help create a culture where diversity is celebrated, opportunities are accessible to all, and equality becomes a reality rather than a distant dream.



*"Training journalists in religious literacy and cultural sensitivity is a valuable step toward countering religious bias and reducing faith-based animosity."*

## **ABDUL RAFAY JAMALI, HYDERABAD**

### **5. What is the most significant source of division in society, and what strategies can be employed to address it?**

From my perspective, the most significant source of division in today's polarized society is the deeply entrenched structural inequalities—manifested through economic disparity, systemic racism, and political polarization. These disparities are further exacerbated, leading to social unrest. For example, economic inequality often fosters resentment between social classes. At the same time, algorithm-driven and partisan media continue to prioritize sensationalism over accurate reporting, deepening divisions.

To address these issues, multifaceted strategies are essential. Education and critical media literacy can empower individuals to recognize bias and engage with diverse perspectives. Secondly, policy reforms that address root causes—such as equitable access to healthcare, education, and economic opportunities—can reduce the material inequalities that fuel resentment.

Lastly, grassroots efforts such as community dialogues and intercultural initiatives can help rebuild trust, bridge societal gaps, and emphasize shared values.

### **6. Which session of the workshop resonated with you the most, and why?**

Dr Khalid Masud's session on social cohesion challenges in a Muslim society inspired me the most. I was deeply moved by this session because it directly addressed both the complexities and opportunities facing diverse Muslim communities in a globalized world.

The session was particularly compelling in its recognition that social cohesion is not solely about religious identity, but also intersects with issues such as gender equity, economic disparity, and ethnic marginalization. For example, the panelists explored how rigid interpretations of tradition or exclusionary narratives can alienate youth, women, and minority groups, fueling internal fragmentation.

Ultimately, the session resonated with me because it framed social cohesion not as a distant dream, but as an active, collective project that requires courage, humility, and collaboration. It left me reflecting on how both individuals and institutions can contribute to building inclusive societies where diversity is embraced as a strength rather than perceived as a threat.

### **7. How did the workshop challenge your existing perceptions about interfaith harmony?**

The workshop significantly changed my perception of interfaith harmony by exposing the subtle stereotypes that are associated with different religious communities. Through interactive sessions on debunking stereotypes, I realized how unconscious biases, combined with a lack of knowledge, can distort our understanding of other beliefs and practices. The emphasis on encouraging diverse communities reinforced the idea that genuine inclusivity requires active discourse rather than passive acceptance.

Celebrating interfaith harmony through shared stories and collaborative activities further shifted my perspective, highlighting the power of mutual respect and common values in fostering unity. I am highly indebted to Pak Institute for Peace Studies for organizing such an eye-opening workshop on encouraging inclusivity and acceptance.

## **This quarter's key message**

**"Peace and tolerance are the cornerstones of a just and inclusive society.**

**Embracing diversity with respect paves the way for harmony and shared progress."**