

Submission by Desmond Fernandes

Thank you for inviting me to speak at these hearings today. My name is Desmond Fernandes and I am the author of the book *Education, Human Rights Violations in Pakistan and the Scandal involving UNHCR and Christian asylum seekers in Thailand* (British Pakistani Christian Association: London, 2015) and co-author of the books *The Targeting of Minority 'Others' in Pakistan* (British Pakistani Christian Association: London, 2013) and *The Education System in Pakistan: Discrimination and the Targeting of the 'Other'* (British Pakistani Christian Association: London, 2014).

I am a former Senior Lecturer in Human Geography and genocide studies at De Montfort University (UK), a member of the Campaign Against Criminalising Communities (CAMPACC) and an Advisory Council member of the European Union-Turkey Civic Commission (EUTCC). For over 20 years, I have been researching into, publishing and presenting papers, reports and books that focus upon on issues relating to educational policies, the criminalisation of communities, persecution, genocide and state targeting of the 'Other' in countries in South and South East Asia, the Near and Middle East, the European Union and the Americas.

I have made over 20 presentations in the UK parliament and one in the European Parliament since 2006 on human rights issues and on 4th March 2014 was invited to speak at a special Foreign Affairs Committee hearing regarding the human rights situation of minorities in Pakistan in the Dutch House of Representatives.

I have been a lead researcher (alongside Nathanael Lewis) for the British Pakistani Christian Association (BPCA) since 2013 and have co-ordinated its 3 book projects that have focused upon the targeting of "Othered" (inclusive of Christian) groups and communities in Pakistan. I also authored the *BPCA Submission to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 9th October 2015 Report* that was also cc'd to the All Party Parliamentary Group for International Freedom of Religion or Belief, with reference to this Parliamentary Inquiry for Call for Evidence (Subject: 'The Plight of Minority Religious or Belief Groups in Pakistan and as Refugees: Addressing Current UK & UNHCR Policy').

I wish today, in the brief time I have here, to say a few things about the nature of persecution that Christians face in Pakistan. Christians, alongside "Othered" religious, ethnic and political communities, are clearly being subjected to persecution in Pakistan. This viewpoint – i.e. that Christians in Pakistan are being subjected to persecution - has clearly been identified and recognised, *as such*, by a number of human rights organisations, political analysts, human rights organisations, faith and non-faith groups and leaders, academics, lawyers, governmental bodies and genocide scholars.

It is necessary, given the Home Office's denialism in the matter (I refer to its *The UK Country Information and Guidance for Pakistan: Christians and Christian Converts, February 2015 report*),ⁱ to cite some prominent findings. But before that, it is worth examining what the Home Office February 2015 report states on these issues:

The country guidance (CG) case AK & SK (Christians: risk) Pakistan (CG) [2014] UKUT 569 (IAC) (15 December 2014) found that 'Christians in Pakistan are a religious minority who, in general, suffer discrimination but this is not sufficient to amount to a real risk of persecution'. (Summary: paragraph 1).

2.2.2 There are incidents of some Christians being subject to harassment, discrimination, violence and murder at the hands of non state actors in Pakistan, as well as allegations of blasphemy and forced conversion to Islam (see Violence and discrimination against Christians in the country information). However, there are a large number of Christians in the country and the evidence does not indicate that Christians are, in general, subject to a real risk of persecution or inhuman or degrading treatment ...

2.2.4 In the case of a Christian woman AK & SK (Christians: risk) Pakistan found that 'Like other women in Pakistan, Christian women, in general, face discrimination and may be at a heightened risk but this falls short of a generalised real risk.'ⁱⁱ

This position is strikingly at odds with the following findings and conclusions by others:

- The *Human Rights and Democracy: The 2014 Foreign & Commonwealth Office Report* presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs by Command of Her Majesty (March 2015), in the 'Freedom of Religion or Belief' section, acknowledged the following:

Shia, Hazara, **Christian**, Ahmadiyya, Hindu, Sikh, Kalash, Ismaili and Sufi communities *reported intimidation and violence, kidnap, forced conversion and marriage, attacks on their places of worship, and other forms of targeted persecution* (emphasis added).ⁱⁱⁱ

The *Human Rights and Democracy: 2013 Foreign & Commonwealth Office Report* had similarly clarified that:

Christian, Sikh, Hindu, Ahmadiya, Shia and minority ethnic communities in Pakistan *reported intimidation and violence, kidnap, forced conversion and marriage, and other forms of targeted persecution and discrimination in the course of the year* (emphasis added).^{iv}

The *2012 Human Rights and Democracy: Foreign & Commonwealth Office* again clarified that:

We receive regular reports from many communities – **including Christian**, Hindu, Ahmadi, Sufi, Shia and minority ethnic communities – *who continue to face intimidation and violence, forced conversion, destruction of property and vandalism of graves and other forms of targeted persecution and discrimination* (emphasis added).^v

- In December 2014, the Dutch government designated Pakistani Christians as a 'risk group' subject to persecution: "Mosa Zahed, founding director of Middle East Forum for Development, emphasised

that: 'It is commendable that the Dutch government recognises Pakistani Christians as a risk group which guarantees them safety and protection in The Netherlands”'.^{vi}

- In response to the twin suicide bombings outside two churches in March this year in Lahore, Pope Francis stated that: “These are Christian churches: Christians are being persecuted ... I assure you of my prayers for the victims and their families ... and that this persecution against Christians which the world tries to hide might end and that there may be peace”.^{vii}

In May this year, “the pontiff [again] gave a special greeting to the family of Asia Bibi ... saying he would pray for her and all the persecuted Christians in Pakistan ... The church attacks prompted Pope Francis to call for solidarity with the country’s Christian minority, **who were being persecuted for their beliefs**”.^{viii}

- The Catholic Church in England and Wales in June this year “urged the British Government to 'make strong representations' to Pakistan about the need to protect its minorities from persecution”.^{ix}

- Advocate Sardar Mushtaq Gill, National Director of the Legal Evangelical Association Development (LEAD) and Mrs Imran, co-ordinator of LEAD in Pakistan, are clear in their assessment that: “The misuse of the blasphemy law against Pakistani Christians is one of the major concerns and there have been many incidents that, in our opinion, have been acute enough to draw a statement from the world ... The persecution of Christians includes the kidnapping of Christian women, forced marriages, forced conversion to Islam and kidnapping and death threats to other known Christians, lawyers, pastors and the targeted killings of Christians who hold public office. Hindu and Christian representatives say forced conversions to Islam have become the latest weapon of Islamic extremists ... on top of assassinations and mob intimidation of houses of worship ... Minorities, including Christians, are at the receiving end in Pakistan ... It is a conspiracy that Hindus and Christians and other minorities should leave Pakistan.”^x

- Alexander Lucie-Smith, consulting editor of the *Catholic Herald* has concluded that: “The Christians of Pakistan are a tiny minority, but at the same time they are ... a visible minority, an easy target for bombers and, of course, let us not forget, thanks to the blasphemy laws, the object of state-sponsored persecution”.^{xi} “Christians run the risk of being murdered by their fellow citizens, just for being Christian, and being judicially murdered by the State for the same reason”.^{xii}

- “Pakistan is ranked #8 on the Open Doors 2015 World Watch List of the worst persecutors of Christians”.^{xiii} It is marked as “79/100” giving it the classification “Extreme Persecution”.^{xiv}

- Human Rights Watch, in July 2014, asserted that “members of the Ahmaddiya, Christian, and other religious minority communities are at acute risk of violent persecution and discrimination in Pakistan ... The persecution of religious minorities is wholly legalized by the Pakistani government. Pakistan’s penal code explicitly discriminates against religious minorities ... Despite the persecution of

members of religious and ethnic minorities in Pakistan, the Pakistani government has shown nothing but contempt toward those who have fled the country and sought asylum abroad. The Pakistani newspaper, *The Dawn*, quoted foreign office spokesperson Tasnim Aslam as saying, 'These people obtained asylum in Sri Lanka by badmouthing Pakistan'. 'Sri Lankan authorities'" - and, I might add, UK authorities given their flawed Home Office guidance regarding the non-persecutory nature of Pakistani Christians - "should know that Pakistan fails to protect its minority communities from persecution', Frelick [from Human Rights Watch] said".^{xv}

- The European Parliament resolution of 27 November 2014 on Pakistan: blasphemy laws (2014/2969(RSP)) noted the following:

The European Parliament:

- having regard to its previous resolutions on Pakistan,
- having regard to Article 18 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 18 of the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,
- having regard to the 1981 UN Declaration on the Elimination of all Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination based on Religion or Belief,
- having regard to the reports of the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief,
- having regard to the report of 4 April 2013 by the UN Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, Gabriela Knaul, drawn up following her mission to Pakistan from 19 to 29 May 2012,
- having regard to its resolution of 11 December 2013 on the Annual Report on Human Rights and Democracy in the World 2012 and the European Union's policy on the matter, **condemning the persecution of Christians and other religious minorities ...**

Expresses its deep concern that the controversial blasphemy laws are open to misuse that can affect people of all faiths in Pakistan; expresses its particular concern that the blasphemy laws, which were publicly opposed by the late Minister Shahbaz Bhatti, the late Governor Salman Taseer and Rashid Rehman, who were killed for their stance in favour of religious tolerance, are increasingly used to target vulnerable minority groups, including Ahmedis **and Christians**, in Pakistan".^{xvi}

- "Most asylum seekers from Pakistan belong to religious minorities, including Ahmadiyya Muslim, Christian and Shia, groups that are often subjected to persecution, discrimination and violence in Pakistan",^{xvii} noted UN Special Rapporteur on minority issues, Rita Izsák.

- According to Aid for the Church in Need: "Christians in Pakistan find themselves at the centre of a crisis ... Especially in the last 12 months, the trouble for Christians has escalated. In that time, they

have suffered some of the bloodiest persecution in the country's history. As well as violent attacks, they face more calls to abandon their faith, more discrimination at work and at home, and more attacks on their livelihood than ever before".^{xviii}

- Mohshin Habib, writing for the Gatestone Institute, in April 2013 reported that: "Most of the time, the Pakistani extremists use two common accusations to persecute the Christians ... *Christians in Pakistan*, a news site on behalf of the Pakistani Christian community, [has] predicted that the situation is becoming alarming ... There have been many extra-judicial killings of Christians, seizures of Christian graveyards and forcibly vacating from lands where Christian have been living for decades. Some people accused of blasphemy have been killed in prison or shot dead in court".^{xix}

- According to the Voice Society in Pakistan, "the blasphemy law" is currently used "in Pakistan as a weapon for persecution of Christians. This draconian law is a hanging sword on the heads of the religious minorities. Usually, blasphemy law is misused by the Muslims against the religious minorities to settle their enmity, rivalry, hiding criminal offences like commission of rape and kidnapping of girls belonging to minorities' faiths. Mainly, the Muslim fundamentalists target the Christian community of their having their religion, which USA and European countries profess. After the Afghan War 2001, the atrocities with Christian community have increased ... Pakistani Christians should be given asylum in Europe on the basis of generalized marginalization and persecution of Christians in Pakistan".^{xx}

It adds: "Christians remain under the closest scrutiny of ... fundamentalist groups. The state is either not powerful enough or unwilling to protect these minorities in general and the Christian minority in particular, against these conservative elements. Any protection provided to these Christians is immediately classified [by the aforementioned groups] as being based on the dictates of the West, and particularly at the behest of the hateful United States ... Whenever something goes wrong between Islam and the West [in terms of how things are portrayed by these groups], the first people to feel the full brunt of reactions are the Christians who face the threat of mob violence against which the state is either unwilling or unable to protect them. What happens as an intermittent reality becomes an ever-present sword of Damocles and makes the Christians of Pakistan extremely insecure.

"The past few years have witnessed a string of attacks against Christian groups across Pakistan highlighting not only the victimization and persecution of minority Christians, but pointing to a catalogue of suppression against religious and individual rights on a wider scale ... The Government of Pakistan [ha]s failed to protect the minorities especially Christians in Pakistan. Normally constitutionally it is state that is responsible for the safety, security and prosperity of its people. But the Pakistani state has failed even to give Christians the status of Pakistani in Pakistan ...

“What our state Government has failed to provide us Christians in Pakistan is the right to be Pakistani, the right to live, the right to speak and the right to [freely] practice our religion. Christian parents in Pakistan are terribly afraid for their children. Some do not want even to let them out of the house. Pakistan is no longer a safe place for Christians. Violent incidents against individuals and churches have increased recently, as part of a growing campaign of violence by Islamist militants against the country’s religious minorities. In this climate of persistent volatility and insecurity, Christian children are especially vulnerable. Not only are they easy targets for violence, unable to protect them or to flee, girls in particular may also be kidnapped and forcibly converted to Islam ... The militant Islamic organizations use to abduct children between the ages of six to twelve from their homes in remote Christian villages in the Punjab and incarcerate them in awful conditions until they are sold ...

Christian pupils ... may be publicly ridiculed or even beaten by teachers because of their faith. The curriculum in non-Christian schools strongly emphasizes Islam. Christian children may be required to study it – even though the law says that they should not be – and they are not given parallel instruction in their own religion. They may be marked down in their examinations simply because they are Christians, and they face many difficulties in obtaining university places”.^{xxi}

- Christian Freedom International has concluded that:

The abduction, forced marriage, and conversion of Christian girls by Muslims has become a disturbing trend in Pakistan; in fact, it is estimated that as many as 700 girls are abused in this manner each year. In most of these cases, the authorities rarely take action and the girls are never returned to their families. If the girls are raped and become pregnant, it is nearly impossible for the courts to release them from their captors ... According to Jonathan Racho with International Christian Concern, “Rape has been used as a weapon of persecution against Christian girls in Pakistan, where Christians are treated as third-class citizens. In the Muslim majority country, Christian girls are particularly vulnerable to these types of crimes because Muslim authorities are reluctant to protect them when their rights are being violated by Muslims”. Nazir Bhatti, president of the Pakistan Christian Congress, has stated that over 99.9 percent of rape cases involving Christian women go unreported.^{xxii}

- Bishop Samuel Azariah of the Diocese of Raiwind, moderator of the Church of Pakistan, confirms “years of intense persecution from religious extremists” that Christians have suffered from in Pakistan.^{xxiii}

- In late March 2015, “Francis Mehboob Sada, director of the Christian Study Centre in Rawalpindi, an ecumenical centre for the promotion and protection of minorities in Pakistan, told Fides: ‘We are bitter about the vulnerability of Christians who suffer under the regime of apartheid and the stigma of persecution. The attitude of the police [to the recent anti-Christian attacks] was appalling and

shameful. With other NGO's, we will write to the President and the Prime Minister, asking for urgent action', he said".^{xxiv}

- The Bishop of Peshawar, Humphrey Peters, said in an Easter [2015] message" in early April "that the terrorist attacks 'have left a permanent scar on the memory and soul of the Christian community of Pakistan ... All these threats, incidents of violence and targeted persecution dishearten the Christian community of Pakistan".^{xxv}

- The Very Rev. Patrick Augustine, the Pakistan-born rector of Christ Episcopal Church in La Crosse, Wisconsin, who was awarded the Cross of St. Augustine by former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams in recognition of his contributions internationally to evangelism, ecumenism, and peace and reconciliation between faiths, during a visit to Islamabad in February 2015, spoke of his visit there as a "land where Christians are discriminated and persecuted on daily basis".^{xxvi}

- "Extremists now disproportionately accuse Christians of blasphemy. In 2013", according to International Christian Concern's William Stark, Christians who were officially accused of blasphemy represented "one-third of all blasphemy accusations that year ... Yet Christians make up only 2.5 percent of the population".^{xxvii}

- The former Bishop of Rochester, Michael Nazir-Ali, who has served as president of the organisation Oxtrad, building up church leadership in countries where Christians are persecuted such as Iran, Iraq, Pakistan and Nigeria, as well as working in advocacy and human rights (and who was the first Bishop of Raiwind in West Punjab, and the youngest bishop in the Anglican Communion when he was granted refuge in England in 1986 when his life was at risk, thanks to the intervention of the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Robert Runcie), has spoken of "the terrible persecution and discrimination that" the Christian community in Pakistan "suffers [from]. All of these are sitting ducks for any kind of terrorist to do whatever they like".^{xxviii}

- "'I would say that today we are in the worst period in history for the life of Christians in Pakistan', said James Channan, O.P., director of the Peace Centre in Lahore. **'Discrimination, suffering, oppression often become real persecution.** Today we ask the government: where is justice?' Mervyn Thomas, director of Christian Solidarity Worldwide, said in a statement released on April 15: 'The culture of impunity must end, and religious minorities must be guaranteed the rights of all citizens in Pakistan"^{xxix}

- "The Religious Liberty Commission (RLC), launched at Westminster, is calling on the British government to intervene to prevent religious cleansing and violent persecution. The Most Reverend and Rt Hon Justin Welby gave the keynote address at the launch of the RLC at the Palace of Westminster [in 2015]. Highlighting the persecution of Christians in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, attacks against Jews in Europe and the firebombing of mosques, he told an audience of parliamentarians and church leaders: 'That quiet creeping removals of freedom that create a

climate of fear and animosity is why we must speak out. We must speak out in solidarity. Silence is not an option' ...

“The RLC is a Commission of the Evangelical Alliance, comprising Christian Solidarity Worldwide, Open Doors UK and Release International. These groups, which have been working for decades to raise awareness of persecution issues, will be collaborating under the banner ‘One voice for the persecuted Church’ ... Mervyn Thomas, the CEO of Christian Solidarity Worldwide ... added: ‘Our purpose is to amplify the cries of the persecuted so the world can no longer ignore them’”.^{xxx}

- The UK charity Release's “partners in the region report a marked increase in the gang-rape of Christian girls and the problem remains of their abduction, forced conversion and marriage ... In Peshawar, in September 2013, a twin suicide bombing killed 99 Christians and injured at least 140 who met to worship together ... Combined with [the even more recent twin bomb] attacks, said Release, the message that the Taliban are sending to Pakistan's Christians is that they have the capacity to attack Christians whether they are in the minority or in the majority”.^{xxxii}

- In 2015, the Clarion Project concluded that “Pakistan’s Christians face extreme persecution”.^{xxxiii}

- Sabatina James and Professor Rainer Rothfuss confirmed at the end of last year that: “According to the Pew Research Centre, Pakistan, as the first country ever within the studies series monitoring religious intolerance since 2007, has reached the highest possible score of 10.0 [out of 10.0] on the scale of social hostilities in 2011 and of 9.8 in 2012”.^{xxxiii} According to a Jubilee Campaign April 2015 report: “Pakistan is rated as number eight in a persecution index of religious minorities. PEW research ranks Pakistan as the second worst in societal persecution”.^{xxxiv}

- In “Evidence Taking Sessions With Pakistani Christians” in September 2015, David Alton, Vice-Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group for International Freedom of Religion or Belief recorded that:

Evidence Taking Sessions were kindly facilitated by Thai friends introduced to us by *Jubilee Campaign*. We took evidence from refugees and human rights advocates and also had meetings with UNHCR officials and diplomats. Throughout our meetings with human rights advocates and escapees, we heard a number of disturbing accounts of shocking and systematic persecution in Pakistan ... The use of Blasphemy Laws ... have become a pretext for systematic and punitive persecution of Christians ...

The accounts which we heard during our evidence sessions paint a picture of well founded fear and from which asylum represents the only prospect of safety and survival ... Another witness underlined the endemic nature of persecution: “It was not just directed at me. It is directed at every Christian” ... [Yet another] witness reflected on the dangers facing Christians in Pakistan. He provided documented evidence and examples of the rape of Christian girls, many of whom are the victims of forced marriages ... He said that return was impossible as they would be jailed and on release would face lives of violent persecution.^{xxxv}

- Even at the briefing in the House of Commons on 15th May 2012, MP's and Peers heard how Christian women in countries marked by religious persecution such as Pakistan experienced kidnapping, violence, rape and even had basics like water denied them. Evidence of widespread discrimination against Christian women was highlighted from a number of reports. These included the *Life on the Margins* by the Pakistani Catholic Church's National Commission for Justice and Peace and Catholic charity Aid to the Church in Need's book *Christians and the Struggle for Religious Freedom*.^{xxxvi}

As I have reported elsewhere, citing sources:

The Home Office's policy has significance beyond the UK's borders. It has been explicitly cited by the UNHCR as grounds for not prioritising Pakistani Christian asylum seekers and refugees.

[BPCA Chair Wilson] Chowdhry [amongst others has] said the issue lies in the UK [in its Country Guidance cynically or naively] relying on what the nation's constitution says and the government's official line rather than "the lived reality of Christian citizens of Pakistan". The Home Office guidance inflates the efficacy and integrity of Pakistan's police and judicial forces [to be protective], according to Chowdhry. He suggests they have underestimated the increasingly influential extremist groups who have infiltrated the government and use such forces to target Christians ...

The UK policy has affected Pakistanis seeking asylum in other nations. Thailand and Sri Lanka have both forceably deported Pakistani Christians on the authority of the UNHCR recommendation. BPCA fears there is a systematic campaign of misinformation by the Pakistani government and intelligence agencies to suppress the reality of life in Pakistan for Christians [and many targeted 'Others']. The disapproval of the current [UK government] policy, which may well be influenced by such misinformation, goes beyond BPCA.

Lord Alton of Liverpool, an active campaigner for religious freedom and human rights suggested whoever wrote the [Home Office] statement should be sent to live in Pakistan with a Christian family in order that they might understand the reality:

"If a systematic campaign of bombings, killings, the burning alive of people and their homes, the rape and forced marriage of Christian girls and a systematic campaign whipping up hatred doesn't amount to persecution, it is hard to imagine what would have to happen before the Home Office described it as persecution".^{xxxvii}

The Home Office's dangerous and cynical tendency – against the available evidence that is available to those

who genuinely have concerns over these matters – to inflate the efficacy and integrity of Pakistan's police and judicial forces, thereby deeming Christian communities to be generally free from persecution, may be evidenced by its guidance/finding in its 2015 report that:

The CG case AK & SK (Christians: risk) Pakistan also found that ‘Pakistani law strictly forbids forced conversions, as does Islam. The Supreme Court has actively pursued cases related to forced conversion and discouraged it. In such cases, the courts have ensured that concerned individuals have an opportunity to express their wishes to convert or complain about any threat or pressure they may be facing in complete privacy and safety. The Supreme Court has also given them a period of reflection away from all sources that may influence their decision’ (paragraph 61) ... Some Christians in Pakistan face discrimination and attacks targeted against them by non state actors. **In general, the government is willing and able to provide protection against such attacks and internal relocation is a viable option**’.^{xxxviii}

But such a stance is contested by a wide range of human rights organisations and faith and non-faith groups and their spokespersons' documented findings, as well as by lawyers, human rights campaigners and public interest groups in Pakistan. It is at odds with the following conclusions by prominent observers and witnesses to what is actually happening – As such, Home Office guidance to the effect that, “in general, the government is willing and able to provide protection against such attacks and internal relocation is a viable option” should be revised in light of the following findings (just as its guidance that targeting of Christians falls short of persecution should also be revised):

- In March this year:

The Justice and Peace Commission of the Pakistani bishops’ conference issued a statement ... lamenting the “minimal” protection the government offered to Christians, despite the fact that threats against Christians had been made in the days before the attack [in which 14 people were killed and least 78 people were injured in suicide bomb attacks on two churches in Pakistan] ... Because of [police] negligence, many Christians lost their lives”, said the statement.^{xxxix}

- In mid-March this year, the Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) confirmed that:

The situation with religious minority groups is deteriorating day by day in Pakistan ... However, the attacks on religious places of religious minority groups continues unabated besides the target killings of individuals from minority groups ...

Christians in Pakistan have borne the brunt of increasing radicalization and extremism. The peace loving community has been targeted time and again for no crime of theirs. Christians, Ahmadis, Hindus, the Shia community are continuously being targeted for professing a faith other than the Sunni faith. The places of worship of these communities are susceptible to targeting by the Taliban, yet the state knowing the dangers posed to these places has offered

no protection ...

Resultantly, there is no semblance of rule of law in Pakistan today. The impunity that these so called *jihadists* have from the government has virtually made it impossible for the minorities to enjoy rights on the same footing as that of the [Sunni] Muslim majority. The state [ostensibly] appears tactless to the point of being complicit in such attacks ... To date, the government has failed to arrive at a political consensus on the list of banned outfits. This criminal complicity of the government has encouraged the extremist factions to declare an all out war against the marginalized religious non-Muslim, non-Sunni minorities of Pakistan ... The government has failed miserably at protecting the Christian minorities who have been left at the mercy of religious fanatics. Sadly, this is not the first or last time that this community has been made a target.^{xi}

- Human Rights Watch, in July 2014, asserted that “members of the Ahmaddiya, Christian, and other religious minority communities are at acute risk of violent persecution and discrimination in Pakistan ... The persecution of religious minorities is wholly legalized by the Pakistani government. Pakistan’s penal code explicitly discriminates against religious minorities ... Despite the persecution of members of religious and ethnic minorities in Pakistan, the Pakistani government has shown nothing but contempt toward those who have fled the country and sought asylum abroad. The Pakistani newspaper, *The Dawn*, quoted foreign office spokesperson Tasnim Aslam as saying, ‘These people obtained asylum in Sri Lanka by badmouthing Pakistan’. ‘Sri Lankan authorities should know that Pakistan fails to protect its minority communities from persecution’, Frelick [from Human Rights Watch] said”.^{xli+}

- In October 2014, in the wake of the blasphemy case against Mohammad Asghar, Kate Allen UK Director of Amnesty International, said: “This is the latest blasphemy outrage to come out of Pakistan. It seems obvious that this is a case of religious persecution, and it’s very likely the result of a squabble which escalated out of all proportion. Blasphemy accusations in Pakistan are often used to settle petty vendettas and persecute minority groups. It’s a complete disgrace that the courts are complicit in these vendettas. Asia Bibi and Mohammad Asghar are both languishing on death row for crimes which shouldn’t even be criminalised. They should both be released immediately. Pakistan should get rid of these poisonous blasphemy laws”.^{xlii}

In its 2014-15 Pakistan country report, Amnesty International concluded that: “Religious minorities continued to face laws and practices that resulted in their discrimination and persecution ... The blasphemy laws remained in force, in violation of the rights to freedom of thought, conscience and religion and freedom of opinion and expression. Abuse connected with the blasphemy laws occurred regularly during the year as demonstrated in several high-profile cases”.^{xliii}

- The US Commission on International Religious Freedom has recently “collated statistics of publicly-reported attacks and has found that violence against Christian communities has risen substantially in recent months ... The findings of the Project show that religious-based violence continues to persist, with little to no effective Pakistani government response at federal, provincial, or local levels', the report continues ... Regarding attacks on religious groups, the government failed to take steps to hold perpetrators accountable or protect the vulnerable”^{xliii}.

In its policy recommendations to the President in its 2015 Annual Report (covering the period from January 31, 2014 through January 31, 2015, although in some cases significant events that occurred after the reporting period are also mentioned), it confirmed that:

The Pakistani government’s failure to effectively intervene against violence targeting the Shi’a minority community, as well as against Christians, Hindus and Ahmadis, continued during the reporting period ... Violence against Christians continued, with few concrete actions taken by federal or provincial officials to ensure their protection. For instance, after the 2013 mob attack on the Christian village Joseph Colony in Punjab, the provincial government provided some reparations but all of the attackers were released on bail. The only person serving a prison sentence is a Christian falsely accused of blasphemy, who was sentenced to death. Other attacks against Christians because of allegations of blasphemy continued ... Forced conversion of Christian and Hindu girls and young women into Islam and forced marriage remains a systemic problem.^{xliii}

- Violence against Christians is on the rise in Pakistan, where a disturbing trend of attacks by Islamist fanatics has made life inside the US ally hell for religious minorities. The 97-percent Muslim nation that straddles the Middle East and Asia is one of the most dangerous places in the world for Christians, according to an annual report published [in 2015] by the State Department ...

"Pakistan is on record as having one of the world's worst and most widely abused blasphemy laws, which has resulted in abuse of the law through false accusations that prosper under a system of impunity", Tiffany Barrans, international legal director for the American Centre for Law & Justice, [said] ... "Blasphemy accusations have resulted not only in the destruction of the lives of the accused but have often been at the root of the destruction of entire Christian communities".

The State Department's Oct. 14 [2015] International Religious Freedom (IRF) report submitted to Congress said that in 2014, government policies in Pakistan, "did **not** afford equal protection to members of majority and minority religious groups, and due to discriminatory legislation, minorities often were afraid to profess freely their religious beliefs. Media and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) reported killings of religious minorities by police".

"The government’s general failure to investigate, arrest, or prosecute those responsible for societal

abuses promoted an environment of impunity that fostered intolerance and acts of violence", the report said. "In numerous cases during the year, authorities failed to protect victims of religiously motivated mob violence".xlvi

- According to the US Department of State 2014 *Report on International Religious Freedom – Pakistan*:

Members of religious minority communities said the federal Ministry of Law, Justice, and Human Rights, and its provincial counterparts, had failed to safeguard minority rights. Observers noted the inconsistent application of laws and enforcement of protections of religious minorities at both the federal and provincial levels remained serious problems.

On June 19, the Supreme Court ordered the government to compensate fully the families of the victims of the September 2013 bombing of Peshawar's All Saints Church that killed at least 83 and injured more than 146. The court noted that the government had delayed financial compensation to the families. The church reported families had yet to receive full compensation by the end of the year ... Coerced conversions of religious minorities to Islam occurred at the hands of societal actors. Religious minorities expressed concern that government action addressing coerced conversions of religious minorities to Islam by societal actors was absent or inadequate ...

According to reports from the Jinnah Institute and other organizations, public school curricula included derogatory statements in textbooks about minority religious groups, particularly Ahmadis, Hindus, Jews, and Christians and the teaching of religious intolerance was widespread. According to a 2013 report by the human rights NGO National Commission for Justice and Peace, hate material in school curricula was the main reason for discrimination towards minority groups. Examining textbooks for the 2012-13 academic years in Punjab and Sindh for grades 1 to10, the report found the curricula included discriminatory and inflammatory material against Hindus, Christians, and other religious minorities.xlvii

- In March this year, it was reported that “Pakistan’s Prime Minister must take part of the blame for yesterday’s deadly attacks on Sunday churchgoers, according to the leader of the country’s Catholics. *Archbishop Joseph Coutts of Karachi accused Nawaz Sharif and his chief ministers of leaving minority faith communities open to attack by failing to act on a 2014 order from the Supreme Court to provide security in all places of worship.* Outlining the significance of the court order, the archbishop, who is President of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Pakistan, said: 'This order of the Supreme Court has not been implemented'. In his message, ... the archbishop added: “This new act of terrorism has cruelly shown how defenceless we are due to *this* neglect' ...

Further criticism of the government [has] came from leaders of the National Commission for Justice

and Peace (NCJP), which acts on behalf of the Catholic Church in Pakistan. The NCJP accused the authorities and the police of failing to provide basic security for churches despite an ongoing threat of violence faced by Christian communities in Youhanabad and elsewhere. NCJP national director Fr Emmanuel Asi and executive director Cecil S Chaudhry said: '... In result of **this negligence**, many Christian people have lost their life and families their loved ones' ... The archbishop also stated: 'Once again, the state has *not* been able to provide safety to its citizens. Millions of citizens continue to live in a state of constant tension and fear, not knowing what to expect next' ... The Bishop of Clifton, Right Rev Declan Lang ... said: "... The statement by Archbishop Coutts makes clear what the Pakistan government's responsibilities are and how much more needs to be done to protect its citizens".^{xlvi}

- In March 2015, after "members of the Taliban launched suicide bombings against a Catholic church and a Protestant church in Pakistan, leaving at least 14 dead, arriving at the bombed church in the afternoon, Archbishop Sebastian Shah of Lahore complained: 'The government has failed to protect us'. The bishop said that Christians have pleaded for protection, warning of impending attacks, to no avail".^{xlix}

- In July 2015, the Clarion Project reported that:

Pakistani Christians are fleeing their home country because of violence perpetrated against them both by the state and by Muslim citizens ... Lahore Bishop Alexander Johan Malik described all-too-common situations Christians face today in Pakistan: They are often accused of blasphemy, jailed and/or attacked; their homes and churches are set on fire; their girls are kidnapped, forcibly converted and married to Muslims.

Turning to the state to help is a dead end. The state is usually complicit in the violence and discrimination. Thus, the only alternative has been to flee. Christians who have the means to travel ... have turned to other Asian countries to take them in ...

Kashif Nawab, former UN observer in Pakistan for minorities, agrees [that many Christians are subjected to extreme conditions]: "... Most of them have been extremely vulnerable to allegations of blasphemy. Now, people of this community are seeking sanctuary in UN refugee camps after selling their possessions for whatever they can get to leave as soon as possible", Nawab said.¹

- Commenting on the persecution of Christians, Shia and Ahmadis, former Bishop of Rochester, Michael Nazir-Ali added that:

Shia and Ahmadiyya Muslim minorities are also persecuted in Pakistan. The roots are political, he said. [The recent twin bombings of Christian churches, killing and injuring Christians] were by a Taliban offshoot, and the Taliban were tolerated [by the authorities] in Pakistan for a long time because they were seen as an insurance policy against an India-friendly government in Afghanistan. Extremists have also been tolerated because of their role in furthering the Kashmiri separatist movement. Nazir-Ali said: "I can see the government's interest in having a friendly government in Afghanistan but this cannot be in any way at the expense of the security of the nation itself".^{li}

- “The Pakistan Christian Congress (PCC) Central Secretariat ... ha[s] expressed grave concerns on denial of persecution of Pakistani Christians by [the] United Kingdom administration ... 'There have been incidents of attack on Churches and worshippers, broad day light murders of Christians, lynching of Christian children, women, men and elders and attacks on Christian properties on a pretext to blasphemy laws by Muslim fundamentalists and a failure of government of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to protect Christians lives and properties or to ensure justice but it is unfortunate that Great Britain [does] not takes it as victimization, persecution and oppression', said Nazir Bhatti ... [He has] written a letter to Prime Minister David Cameron for a revision of guidance by the UK Home Office about Pakistani Christians to recognize them as a persecuted and oppressed community of Pakistan”.^{lii}

- In July this year, the Director of the Aurat Foundation confirmed “that incidents [of abduction, forced marriage and forced conversion of Christian, Hindu and 'Othered' girls and women] are largely ignored by police and civil authorities ... The Movement of Solidarity and Peace in Pakistan (MSP) says that in the custody of their abductors, girls 'may be subjected to sexual violence, rape, forced prostitution, human trafficking and sale, or other domestic abuse' ... The US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) in May urged the Obama Administration to designate Pakistan a "country of particular concern" and blamed the Pakistani government for failing to provide adequate protection to targeted groups, particularly religious minorities. "Forced conversion of Christian and Hindu girls and young women into Islam and forced marriage remains a systemic problem", its annual report said.^{liii}

- “According to reports, a European Parliament delegation led by Mr. Peter van Dalen, (Netherlands) Mr. Arne Gericke, (Germany) and Mr. Marek Jurek, (Poland) visited Pakistan between 2-5 November 2015 ... The delegation handed over handouts to all the government officials demanding for the safety of the rights of the minority groups and bring reforms to the blasphemy laws, as the EU parliamentarian said that these laws directly or indirectly affected them as well. They declared, 'the legislation which is supposed to protect and safeguard instead has drenched large parts

of Pakistan's society in fear. During the recent decade the security situation has become worse in Pakistan. Minorities of the country feel insecure in Pakistan, thus Pakistan stands in the top ten source countries of people seeking asylum in the EU".liv

- Nasir Saeed, director of Centre for Legal Aid, Assistance and Settlement (UK), an inter-denominational organisation working on behalf of Christians who are being persecuted because of their faith in Pakistan, said that “Christians are constantly under attack, especially with their churches and colonies being attacked under the cover of blasphemy accusations, and sometimes by Taliban and extremists. Christians are living under constant fear for their lives and many have fled the country. I believe these attacks are sustained attempts to force Christians out of Pakistan” ... Mr Saeed added that the government had failed to provide justice to Christians in light of previous attacks, as most of the incidents had taken place in Punjab where the ruling party, the Pakistan Muslim League (N), has close ties with extremist groups. This attack is a reflection of the government's failure and unfortunately I fear this is not going to be last attack against Christians. The international community must pay attention to the ongoing persecution of Christians in Pakistan.” said Mr Saeed. He welcomed those who had condemned this attack, particularly the Pope's condemnation, saying it gives the very important message to the world and particularly to the Pakistani government and leadership that Pakistani Christians are not left alone in such difficult times.^{lv}

- *Foreign Policy*, in June 2015, reported upon the following situation facing Christians in Pakistan:

The problem has become so serious that religious minorities are fleeing the country in droves. As many as 10,000 Pakistani Christians (but official United Nations' figures say 4,000) are now believed to be living “under the radar” in Thailand, fending off arrest by Thai police for illegal entry as they cling to the hope of making it through the gruelling UN refugee resettlement process. International Christian Concern's offices - an NGO that assists Christians who have been the victims of religious persecution - routinely get calls from Pakistanis around the globe pleading for help as they try to find any possible avenue of escape from an endless cycle of violence and discrimination.

The tragedy in all of this is not simply the scale of human suffering, but the one-sided response of the Pakistani government. In 2013, thousands of enraged Sunni Muslim's rampaged through the Christian neighbourhood of Joseph Colony in Lahore, torching over 100 homes after a Christian man was accused of committing “blasphemy” against Islam. In the two years since, not a single individual from the mob has been convicted. Meanwhile, the Christian accused of blasphemy, Sawan Masih, was arrested and sentenced to death, a penalty that is mandatory by order of the Federal Shariat Court. This example is consistent with a long-running pattern of prosecuting religious minorities while allowing those who persecute them to escape justice.^{lvi}

- Bishop John Samuel of Faisalabad “who had himself been on the receiving end of religious persecution in Pakistan” has noted the following: “In 2009, following attacks on the Christian community, he and other Christians rather than those responsible for the attacks were arrested. He spoke” - on 12th March 2013 during a conference in the House of Lords that was organised by the Pakistan Minorities Rights Organisation (PMRO) UK and hosted by Baroness Berridge who chairs the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on International Religious Freedom – “about his own experiences and the on-going persecution of Christians in Pakistan. Forced conversions, forced marriage and kidnapping of Christians is widespread and it is not easy to practice the Christian faith openly. He recalled heart-breaking stories of human tragedy caused by Pakistan’s Blasphemy Law. Under that law, a mere allegation is enough to put a person’s life in danger. Even if action is not taken by the state, the prospect of mob violence means that Christians experience constant insecurity. [In this context], the International Civil Liberties Alliance (ICLA) believes that the Government of Pakistan deliberately tolerates such lawlessness as a means of marginalising the Christian minority”.^{lvii}

- “The spiritual leader of the world’s Anglicans urged Pakistan to treat all people equally on Wednesday during a trip designed to show his support for the embattled Christian community, saying many felt ‘under siege’. The Archbishop of Canterbury arrived in Pakistan ... to meet Muslim and Anglican leaders at a time when Christians feel under attack from both **authorities** and their Muslim neighbours due to Pakistan's oppressive blasphemy laws. ‘There is a considerable sense of anxiety, of being under siege’, Justin Welby ... told Reuters outside a church in the eastern city of Lahore. ‘There was a very clear sense that people were nervous about the misuse of the blasphemy law, as a sort of a tool of politics, a way of gaining attention, or as a mob thing’, he added, flanked by two Pakistani bishops ...

“In September [2013], around 100 Christian parishioners including many Sunday school children were killed in an attack on a historic church in the city of Peshawar. In a recent case, a seven-year-old Christian girl was gang raped on her way to church in a village near the Indian border, according to a Christian activist ... He said police refused to register her case and a local hospital refused to treat her, forcing the Christian community to scramble to find enough blood donations to keep her alive”.^{lviii}

- In October 2015, it was reported that:

Three Muslim men broke into the home of a deaf Christian woman in a village in the district of Kasur, Pakistan, and took turns raping her while the men of the family were at work. The incident occurred in the Ganda Singh Wala village in the Kasur district of Punjab.

The woman reportedly screamed for mercy while being raped, but no one came to her assistance. Relatives of the woman have retained the services of Christian lawyer [who] ...

filed the first information report with the police ... though he admits that it is not easy to get a case like this prosecuted fairly in Pakistan ... and [he] is not optimistic about seeing justice done. “It’s very difficult to get a punishment for those responsible”, he told the Fides news agency. “Often in these cases the police take no action or, worse, side with the rapists”.^{lix}

- In its International Freedom Report (IRF), the US “State Department report does acknowledge a ‘general failure’ on the part of the Pakistani government ‘to investigate, arrest, or prosecute those responsible for religious freedom abuses’, and that this dereliction of duty ‘promoted an environment of impunity that fostered intolerance and acts of violence’ ... The US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) reported that Pakistan’s selective and often arbitrary enforcement of blasphemy laws exceeds that of any other nation, and is often used to target Christians and other religious minorities. Accusations of blasphemy have also served as a pretext to incite vigilante violence, with lynch mobs taking the law into their own hands.

Pakistani Christians have long protested the lack of government protection from terrorist attacks and religious persecution. A Taliban attack on two Christian churches in March resulted in the death of at least 14 people, with many dozens wounded. A lack of police presence was credited with abetting the violence”.^{lx}

- As Nathanael Lewis, a colleague at the BPCA perceptively notes:

When dealing with asylum rejections done under past and current Home Office guidance, we have consistently found that there is a gross overestimation of the ability and willingness of police or the authorities to protect Christians or treat them fairly, the so called ‘sufficiency of protection’ question, as well as of the room for successful internal relocation, and a gross underestimation of the severity of the situation on the ground ...

The Home Office guidance is important because a number of other countries, and even the UN, tend to look to the UK guidance to formulate their own position, and is causing huge suffering in places like Thailand because Pakistani Christians are deemed not a priority, and also because the guidance seems to tie in with Pakistani government claims that Christians will be safe and can be deported back to the country. This needs to change extremely urgently”.^{lxi}

- For Wilson Chowdhry, BPCA chairman: “Many of the conditions for genocide of Christians have long been in place in Pakistan, and earlier this year the [Pakistan] government itself was inciting hatred against Christians, along with the media, in the aftermath of the double church suicide bombing’. Chowdhry said the warnings [that ISIS threatens Christian targets in Pakistan now] reflected a “worsening reality” for Pakistani Christians, who already face persecution.^{lxii}

Persecution is only set to intensify with the news of ISIS' increasing presence in Pakistan and its reported determination to target all Christian social spaces – This is hardly an environment that the Home Office can

now suggest is generally 'safe' for Christians to go about their daily lives:

The Pakistani government through its armed forces announced that extremists groups in the country which are connected to Islamic State (ISIS) are about to stage [a] wave of terrorist attacks against Christian minorities in the country. Based on reports, military personnel already began warning Christians, both individuals and communities to be more conscious of their security. Christian clerics were also advised to avoid trips, unnecessary outdoor meetings, or simply being away from their churches or communities. According to military intelligence, the terrorists groups are planning to stage attacks on specific places like Christian schools, churches, and even hospitals ...

Several [Taliban] factions have started pledging allegiance and loyalty to ISIS and its leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Hafiz Saeed Khan, a former Pakistani Taliban commander and his group joined the Islamic State early this year. On the other hand, the leader of the Jundallah terrorist organization Ahmed Marwat has also been linked with ISIS. In fact, the Jundallah group is considered the most powerful arm or representation of ISIS in Pakistan. These groups and few others are the ones identified by the Pakistani Army which have planned such upcoming attacks. Pakistan is just one of the countries where Christians and other non-Muslim minorities have long been prosecuted.^{lxiii}

According to Franklin:

The Pakistani government and military have warned the nation's tiny Christian minority that Islamic terrorist groups plan to target Christian religious institutions in the near future. The wave of anti-Christian attacks will allegedly include Pakistan's Christian churches, schools, and hospitals ... Emissaries of the most powerful Pakistani generals and the Ministry of Interior have apparently personally warned Christian clerics that the assault will first be launched in the country's northwest region of Khyber Paktunkhwa ... According to the warnings, the planned attacks against Christian communities in Pakistan will be carried out by some splinter groups that formerly belonged to the Pakistani Taliban ...

In addition, Ahmed Marwat, a.k.a. Farhad Marwat, commander of Pakistan's Jundallah terrorist organization, specifically threatened in June that "the Jundallah will attack kafir Shi'ites, Ismailis and Christians". Marwat met with Islamic State representatives in November 2014. Later the same month, he took responsibility for attacking aid workers in Quetta, Pakistan, and labelled the volunteers "Yahood o Nasara": "Jews and Christians". The Jundallah group, reputedly the Islamic State's most potent ally in Pakistan, claimed responsibility for the twin-suicide bombings against All Saints Church in Peshawar on September 22, 2014. It also probably intends to initiate more anti-Christian atrocities.^{lxiv}

Jindullah Hafsa, it should be noted, as "a wing of the Pakistani Taliban, accepted responsibility for the suicide attacks [on the All Saints Church in Peshawar]. A spokesperson claimed that the organisation will continue to attack foreigners and Christians until the USA halts its drone attacks [which are ever-continuing]

on Pakistani soil. He went on to say that Christians are the enemies of Islam and therefore they will continue to kill them, suggesting that the violence will continue” - in any public or private venues - “regardless. The government”, AHRC noted with extreme concern, in response to all of this “has not taken any significant steps against the perpetrators for these attacks”.^{lxv}

“Jundallah, a group linked to the Pakistani Taliban, claimed responsibility for the attack, saying it was in response to US drone strikes, the latest of which reportedly killed seven people in the tribal area of North Waziristan. 'Until and unless the drone strikes are stopped, we will continue to strike wherever we find an opportunity against non-Muslims', said a Jundallah spokesman”.^{lxvi} The US drone strike policy continues to this day in Pakistan and there is end in sight for this US policy.

Conclusion

The flawed and misleading denialist position of the Home Office in this hardly inconsequential matter relating to the persecution of Christians in Pakistan results in people being processed as “bogus asylum seekers” and subjected to unjust deportation. The *UK Country Information and Guidance for Pakistan: Christians and Christian Converts, February 2015* report, issued by the Home Office, as with earlier Home Office guidance, is disheartening and highly problematic on a number of levels – not just outlined here (in terms of the denialism it advances concerning the persecuted position facing Christians in Pakistan, and the repercussions of this worldwide for Christian Pakistani asylum seekers given the manner in which UNHCR questionably seems to take on board this flawed 'guidance') and in my most recent book and by my BPCA colleagues submission to this Parliamentary Inquiry for Call for Evidence – but also elsewhere, by Still Human Still Here's *Commentary on the July and October 2014 Country Information and Guidance reports issued on Pakistan*, for example (pages 51-60 are particularly instructive).^{lxvii}

In a recent Parliamentary Reply, Lord Michael Bates, Minister of State at the Home Office, promised to make a full assessment of the evidence of persecution of Pakistani Christians and, if appropriate, reconsider Home Office Guidelines. I hope that the evidence gained by the All Party Group on Freedom of Religion and Belief in its hearings and deliberations at Westminster will be taken on board by the Home Office, leading to the appropriate alteration of its stance. Thank you for giving me your time.

I also hope that the All Party Group on Freedom of Religion and Belief will be able to influence the British government concerning the manner in which it provides aid to Pakistan. As documented in my book and others, in just one key area of aid provision, for example, there is substantial concern regarding the nature of provision of 'assistance' to schools (inclusive of British and other international aid assistance) in Pakistan where the curriculum teaches/encourages/enables students to be intolerant of non-Sunni (inclusive of Christian) 'Others' to a frightening degree that can only further sustain the way in which Christian, Hindi, Ahmadi 'Others' are persecuted.

Substantive documentation exists (refer to my recently authored and/or co-authored books, for example) highlighting the discriminatory texts that continue to be used in many schools throughout Pakistan. The US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) in 2012 also concluded that Pakistani primary and secondary schools “continue to use textbooks that foster prejudice and intolerance of religious minorities, especially Hindus and Christians”.^{lxxviii} “Hindus were depicted in especially negative ways, and descriptions of Christians often were erroneous and offensive”.^{lxxix}

As the National Commission - alongside other educationalist and human rights campaigning groups - has noted, current educational policy actually is in breach of key articles in the constitution that seek to protect non-Muslim 'minorities' from targeting:

Article 20 of the Constitution ... guarantees religious freedom, and article 22 that states that "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 [or her] own*". However, the school and education system in general seems to "forget" these two fundamental laws of the Charter of the State.^{lxxx}

Consequently, the National Commission concludes that “there are no substantial differences between public institutions and the madrasas, or Islamic schools”, as far as certain highly discriminatory educational practices are concerned.^{lxxxi} “According to the NCJP, the curriculum and education policy in Punjab and generally whole of Pakistan disregards Article 22 of the Constitution 'when it comes to hundreds of thousands of non-Muslim students attending schools in the province’”.^{lxxxii}

Education to promote peace and tolerance, clearly, cannot occur within these institutionalised discriminatory contexts. The commission, in practical terms, “has ... proposed that any material considered ‘inflammatory’ or ‘discriminatory’ to religious minorities be removed from the syllabus”.^{lxxxiii} Yet, much of it remains to this day in schools throughout Pakistan, despite the initiatives of educationalists and human rights groups.

Segregation policies are also undertaken in many schools (for example, regarding washroom facilities where non-Sunni pupils are denied entry to facilities) – and it is perhaps also here that British aid assistance in education to provincial governments and/or to private schools can come with the proviso that there is to be no such segregation practiced. Many schools are still managed and administered in a manner that promotes intolerance, even persecution, of school-children, who as 'non-Sunnis' are intimidated and subjected to the very real fear of forced conversion, blasphemy accusations and general abuse/attacks and/or even abduction (due to lack of safety provisions for 'Othered' pupils) and fear of rape/murder for being Christian/Hindu/Ahmadi/non-Sunni.

The Archbishop of Karachi and the head of the Council of Pakistani Bishops, in September 2013, for example, “revealed that Christians in the country [we]re under constant pressure to convert to Islam, most

notably in schools. In the wake of the deadliest church bombing in the country, Bishop Joseph Coats ... stat[ed] that Pakistan 'is one of the most difficult countries to live in for Christians. The daily lives of religious minorities in Pakistan are characterized by poverty, injustice and discrimination. Non-Muslims are identified as second-class citizens in school textbooks. Teachers repeatedly ask students to write essays titled: 'Write a letter to your friend encouraging him [or her] to convert to Islam''.^{lxxiv}

As Nazir-Ali has noted:

“Britain’s commitment to aid is praiseworthy but we must make sure that it is directed properly to the right people in the right way. I think we have to target it very carefully and where there is real need to make sure that aid is not being used simply to support British business or other interests and certainly to make sure that it is not being used to sustain corruption' ...

Referring to his own country of birth, he explained: “Let us take the [UK] Government’s huge educational programme in assisting Pakistan. That’s fine, the country needs educational assistance *but the question is will the programme, for example, assist in the revision of the teaching of hate in the text books or will it be sued simply to further it?*”^{lxxv}

Disturbingly, as Gibran Ahmad reported for *Reuters*:

A Pakistani province is rewriting school books to make them more Islamic, inserting verses on jihad, removing pictures of unveiled women and changing material on recent history, officials said ... The public tussle over the changes mirrors a struggle for power ... That struggle often plays out in the classroom. Professors or teachers accused of blasphemy have been attacked, jailed or killed. School books commissioned by provincial governments have been frequently rewritten.

The latest changes in the northwestern province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa cover chemistry, physics, English, history and geography text books. Education official Bashir Hussain Shah told *Reuters* that the changes include reintroducing religious verses on jihad, a word that means holy struggle but is also often used by insurgents. That had been removed from the curriculum for 13 and 14 year olds, he said, but was being restored. Inayatullah Khan, the leader of religious political party, Jamaat-e-Islami, said the verses on jihad were not intended to promote violence but to inform students when jihad was lawful. "It doesn't allow Muslims to fight against those non-Muslims with whom you have diplomatic ties or an agreement", he said.

Changes were also made to history books and science books, Khan said. They would reverse changes that had replaced content about Muslims with material about non-Muslims, including American Helen Keller, an author who was deaf and blind, and Hindu ruler Raja Dahir. "Kashmir, which we consider an integral part of Pakistan, was stated as part of India in the map in a book. Similarly, it was mentioned that Bangladesh got freedom from Pakistan, which we don't accept", he said.

Shah said all pictures of girls without a head scarf would be removed and replaced with pictures where they were wearing a head scarf. Another official said a physics book for teenagers would include Koranic verses regarding the creation of universe and ecosystem.

The previous provincial government was headed by the more secular Awami National Party. When they came to power in 2008, they rewrote textbooks to remove some religious references. The current government, which took power after May 2013 elections, is a coalition led by the party of former famed cricketer Imran Khan. It includes religiously conservative parties like Khan's.

Atif Khan, the provincial education minister, sought to play down the changes, saying they are merely reverting to an earlier curriculum. His provincial education department is getting \$29 million from the British government this year ... Pervez Hoodbhoy, a physics professor campaigning for education reforms, said that textbooks were an important cultural battleground for religious conservatives. "These changes will result in a further hardening of attitudes", he said. "Their whole strategy is to influence the younger generation".^{lxxvi}

Note: Just 3 days after this presentation, the following was reported:

Pakistani school officials in Faisalabad are coming under fire for prohibiting Christian pupils from using lavatories reserved for Muslim students and specifically for a severe punishment administered to a young girl for using a Muslim lavatory. In recent days, a Christian primary school student named Sara Bibi was scolded, beaten and finally locked in a bathroom for three hours as punishment for having using a toilet destined for the exclusive use of Muslim students. Sara Bibi attends a primary school in Samundari near Faisalabad, in Punjab. Some of Sara's classmates reportedly alerted the headmistress that she had used the lavatory.

According to a mentality prevalent in Pakistani society, Christians are considered "unclean" and thus the girl's presence was thought to pollute the bathrooms for the other "clean" girls. The one meting out Sara's punishment was none other than the headmistress of the school, Zahida Rana. According to reports, before locking her in the bathroom, the principal told her: "You are a Christian, an infidel. How dare you use the toilet using Muslim girls?"

The girl reportedly pleaded her innocence, but was punished and only released at the end of the school day. Local Christians have strongly condemned principals "inhuman behaviour" and the Pakistan Christian Congress has asked the Punjab government for a thorough investigation of the incident as well as requesting measures to promote tolerance and interfaith harmony in Pakistan ... In much of today's Pakistan, something akin to Jim Crow laws are still in effect, and Christians often are not permitted to sit in restaurants, schools, universities or offices with Muslims, and nor can they drink water from the same fountains.^{lxxvii}

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- ^{xi} Lucie-Smith, A. (2015) 'Pakistan is a failing state and Christians are paying the ultimate price', *Catholic Herald*, 16 March 2015 (accessed at: <http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/commentandblogs/2015/03/16/pakistan-is-a-failing-state-and-christians-are-paying-the-ultimate-price/>).
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