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Concerning threats to the Ahmadiyya Community

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Open letter to Honorable Khawaja Muhammad Asif, Foreign Minister of Pakistan

Dear Mr. Asif,

FOREF (03.02.2018) - <https://foref-europe.org/> - I am writing on behalf of the *Forum for Religious Freedom-Europe*, an independent, secular human rights organization based in Vienna, Austria.

We are deeply concerned about escalating threats to the Ahmadiyya community in Pakistan. There can be no doubt that such threats are becoming more serious, making it increasingly dangerous and difficult for members of that community to profess their faith.

Especially over the past year, numerous religious leaders in your country have openly called for violence against Ahmadis, indeed, calling for their murder by decapitation.

Death threats against Ahmadis have become commonplace. These are some of the incidents that have alarmed our organization, and the international community:

- The cleric Khadim Hussain Rizvi has challenged Ahmadis to either recite the Islamic creed (kalima) or risk decapitation.
- Rizvi also happens to be the leader of the political party Tehreek-e-Labaik Ya Rasool Allah Pakistan (TLP). In November 2017, the TLP spearheaded three weeks of protests in Islamabad. TLP members opposed a suggestion to introduce a minor change to the oath required by election candidates. On November 26, the federal law minister, who oversaw the change, resigned due to the TLP's protests. The reformulation of the oath, which would have slightly altered the language of the Islamic creed, was thought to have possibly benefited the ostracized Ahmadis because the 2nd constitutional amendment of 1974, which declares Ahmadis to be non-Muslim, would have been circumvented.
- There are also indications that the Pakistani military has collaborated with the leaders of the TLP. This development has raised questions over the army's increasing role in influencing politics in Pakistan by siding with hate preaching mullahs.
- The above mentioned November protests were reportedly marked by violence resulting in the loss of at least six lives and 200 persons injured. Policemen asked by the Islamabad high court to clear the protests were kicked, beaten and tear-gassed by activists whereas the army-dominated paramilitary force, known as Rangers, stood on the sidelines as passive spectators.

- Other Islamist groups such as the Ahl-Hadith, Deobandi and the Barelvi are aligned with permanent institutions of the state, aiming at a gradual implementation of sharia law. These groups advocate the persecution of religious minorities, including Ahmadis.
- In December 2017, a case was registered against six Ahmadis for registering their names on a list of Muslim voters in local elections. The case was registered by the police on the orders of the Lahore High Court.

Incitement to violence is illegal under Pakistani and international law. It is prohibited by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which is legally binding for your government.

And yet, your government has taken no effective action against those making such inflammatory and dangerous statements. As religious extremists find that such statements may be made with impunity, incitement has increased, leading society to the edge of large scale violence against not only the Ahmadiyya community, but against other religious minorities as well.

The international community has been waiting for your government to take action, but the failure to take action leaves the impression of a posture of complicity, as if the escalating threats and violence somehow serve the interests of the government.

Mr. Foreign Minister, no one should ignore or minimize the challenges your government faces in dealing with extremists in your society. But denial and appeasement will only make the problem worse, and will, we fear, place the security of members of religious minorities in even greater doubt.

We thank you for your attention to our concerns, and stand ready to engage in dialogue with your government, and to assist you in complying with international human rights standards and law.

Sincerely,

Dr. Aaron Rhodes

President
