

# **PAKISTAN: Aid for persecuted minorities**

*Question asked by Lord Alton of Liverpool on 6 June (Volume 798)*

APPG (11.06.2019) – To ask Her Majesty's Government how much United Kingdom aid has been given to Pakistan in the last ten years; and what assessment they have made of the extent to which this was used to support persecuted minorities in that country. (Lord Alton of Liverpool)

In asking my Question I should mention that I co-chair the All-Party Parliamentary Group for the Pakistani Minorities.

*The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Baroness Sugg) (Con)*

My Lords, in the past 10 years, the UK has given £2.6 billion in aid to Pakistan, targeted towards the poorest and most excluded, who are often from minorities. We promote minority rights from grass roots to the highest levels of government. UK aid to Pakistan is declining but continues to focus on the poorest. Since 2011, UK aid has supported primary education for 10 million children, skills training for almost 250,000 people, and microfinance loans for 6.6 million people.

*Lord Alton of Liverpool*

I thank the Minister for that reply and welcome her to her new responsibilities. Is she able to intervene on behalf of Shagufta Kauser, an illiterate woman from one of Pakistan's beleaguered minorities, who now occupies Asia Bibi's cell in Multan and who, like her, has been sentenced to death for allegedly sending blasphemous texts in English? When two children are forced to watch a lynch mob of 1,200 burn alive their parents; when no one is brought to justice for the murder of Shahbaz Bhatti, Pakistan's Minister for Minorities; when 1,000 Hindu and Christian girls are forcibly married and converted; and when minorities are ghettoised into squalid colonies, which I have visited, and forced to clean latrines and sweep streets, **is it not time that DfID re-examined its policy of refusing to specifically direct any of the £383,000 that, on average, we give every single day to Pakistan in aid for the alleviation of the suffering and destitution of these desperate minorities?**

***Baroness Sugg***

I pay tribute to the noble Lord's long-standing involvement in this important issue. We remain deeply concerned by the misuse of blasphemy laws and the treatment of minority religious communities in Pakistan. We regularly raise these concerns with the Government of Pakistan at a senior level. I share the noble Lord's desire to ensure that our international aid funding reaches those who most need it. Currently, many Pakistanis are reluctant to declare themselves members of religious minorities because of fear of discrimination. We are working to ensure that we understand where our aid is going. I can reassure the noble Lord that we continually keep our programmes under review, and where we can better prioritise

resources we will do so.

***Lord Collins of Highbury (Lab)***

My Lords, through the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund, ODA money funds the CAPRI programme in Pakistan. While its aim is to increase Pakistan's capacity to investigate, detain and prosecute suspected terrorists, its definition of terrorism is incredibly wide. It has also resulted in torture and **195 death sentences**. Will the Minister ask her department to investigate whether the CAPRI project, supported by the CSSF, could be supporting such human rights abuses? Will she commit to publishing the overseas security and justice assistance assessment that led to this project being signed off by a Minister?

***Baroness Sugg***

As the noble Lord will be aware, the Government oppose the death penalty in all circumstances. We will continue to ensure that our position on that is made clear in all our dealings with partner Governments. I am afraid I am not aware of the specific project that the noble Lord raises, but I will certainly go back to the department and write to him in detail.

***Baroness Sheehan (LD)***

My Lords, the white stripe on the Pakistan flag signifies the

rights of religious minorities, but today Pakistan has strayed a long way from the ideals of its founder, Muhammed Ali Jinnah, and its heinous blasphemy laws are feared with good reason by the same minority groups he sought to protect. I ask the Minister, at the same time as welcoming her to her new role: what safeguards does DfID put in place to ensure that religious minorities are, at the very least, not discriminated against in accessing and benefiting from DfID programmes?

**Baroness Sugg**

My Lords, I mentioned our response to the blasphemy laws in a previous answer. We must continue to stand up for human rights and freedom of religion and belief. The Prime Minister has appointed my noble friend Lord Ahmad as special envoy on the issue. He raises it regularly, and did so recently in February.

***Lord Singh of Wimbledon (CB)***

My Lords, the treatment of minorities in Pakistan, particularly Christians, infringes not only the UN declaration of human rights but, ironically, also the clear teachings of the Koran, which says that the people of the book—that is, Christians and Jews—should be allowed to practise their religion unhindered. Despite this, members of the Christian community have been murdered and placed on death row for years on end for professing their faith, and it is now reported that some Christian women and young girls are being sold into slavery in China and used for the harvesting of organs. With that in mind, does the Minister agree that we should now look

to the targeting of our aid and moving for Pakistan to be expelled, not for the first time, from the Commonwealth?

**Baroness Sugg**

My Lords, I certainly agree that we need to ensure that our international aid reaches those people who need it most. To that end, the Foreign Secretary has commissioned an independent report to fully understand the scope of the issue, and the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Truro will be writing recommendations on how we can better address this issue.

***Lord Mackay of Clashfern (Con)***

My Lords, I understood that human rights practice in the country in question was a factor in the allocation of aid from us. I think it is clear that in Pakistan freedom of religion means that if you have a certain faith you are apt to face the death penalty, which does not strike me as in conformity with human rights or freedom of religion.

**Baroness Sugg**

My Lords, as I said, my department and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office work closely to ensure that we are able to protect minority communities in Pakistan. We have seen some progress, and we welcome the commitments made by Prime Minister Khan to improve inclusion and transparency and to set

Pakistan on a path to greater self-reliance. We have seen positive steps so far, including progress made on child marriage by passing the child marriage restraint Act and the issuing of visas to allow Indian Sikhs to make a pilgrimage to Pakistan. There are other commitments, including the creation of a commission on minorities and the Christian divorce Bill, where we will continue to support the Pakistan Government in implementing those policies.