

URGENT ACTION

POLITICIANS GIVEN PROTECTION BUT MORE NEEDED

Following an Urgent Action issued by Amnesty International on 11 May, additional security has been ordered for regional parliamentarians Saleem Khursheed Khokhar and Pitamber Sewani. They had been receiving threats for campaigning against forced conversions and marriages from the Hindu minority community in Sindh province, Pakistan. Hindu communities in Sindh continue to face persecution and attacks. Pakistani authorities must ensure perpetrators of these attacks are brought to justice.

Amnesty International issued an Urgent Action on 11 May calling on Pakistan's authorities to provide adequate protection to **Saleem Khursheed Khokhar** a Christian Member of the Sindh Provincial Assembly (MPA), after he was threatened for defending the rights of the minority Hindu community. On 12 May Sindh Chief Minister Qaim Ali Shah ordered additional security for Saleem Khursheed Khokhar and Hindu MPA **Pitamber Sewani** who has also received threats for defending the human rights of minority groups.

Saleem Khursheed Khokhar and Pitamber Sewani have welcomed the protection but highlighted concerns that the security detail provided by the Sindh authorities has not been sufficiently vetted, especially in light of recent assassinations of other politicians for defending minorities rights by their own body guards. Saleem Khursheed Khokhar and Pitamber Sewani state that the authorities have yet to find the individuals who carried out the threats against them despite detailed complaints being lodged with the police and orders from Chief Minister Shah for intelligence authorities to investigate. Saleem Khursheed Khokhar and Pitamber Sewani are concerned that no action will be taken against the perpetrators without more public pressure.

Providing adequate physical security to defenders of human rights and bringing perpetrators of threats against them to justice is necessary to protect them from immediate harm. It is also a critical first step towards tackling the wider issue of attacks and other forms of discrimination against minorities.

Please write immediately in English, Urdu or your own language calling on the authorities to:

- Ensure that adequate protection is provided for Saleem Khursheed Khokhar and Pitamber Sewani and their families at all times. This includes ensuring that guards provided are properly vetted;
- Promptly investigate all threats received by Saleem Khursheed Khokhar and Pitamber Sewani, and by anyone involved in campaigning against forced conversions and forced marriages;
- Bring to justice anyone responsible for threats and other abuse against religious minorities, including forced conversion and forced marriage, in trials which meet international standards of fairness.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 13 JULY 2012 TO:

Prime Minister

Syed Yusuf Raza Gilani
Prime Minister House
Islamabad,
Pakistan
E-mail: secretary@cabinet.gov.pk
Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

Chief Minister, Sindh

Qaim Ali Shah
Interior Minister of Sindh
Dr. Zia ud Din Ahmed Road
Karachi, Sindh
Pakistan
Fax: +92 21 992 02000
Salutation: Dear Chief Minister Shah

Inspector General Sindh Police

Mushtaq Shah
Sindh Police
Head Office I. I. Chundrigar Road
Karachi, Sindh
Pakistan
Fax: +92 21 99 212 051
Salutation: Dear Mr Shah

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date. This is the first update of UA 139/12. Further information:

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/ASA33/004/2012/en>

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Saleem Khursheed Khokhar, a Christian, and Pitamber Sewani, a Hindu, are members of Pakistan's Sindh Provincial Assembly and part of the Sindh chapter of the All Pakistan Minorities Alliance (APMA). Saleem Khursheed Khokhar is President of the APMA's Sindh Chapter. On 18 April, after Supreme Court hearings into the possible forced conversion and forced marriage of a Hindu woman, both Saleem Khursheed Khokhar and Pitamber Sewani spoke to the media criticising the abduction and forced conversion of women from religious minority communities. Pitamber Sewani told Amnesty International he received death threats from unknown individuals on his mobile phone. Two days later, Khokhar received a threatening text message saying that Pakistan had been created only for Muslims and only Muslims could live there peacefully, and no one else would be allowed to do so. This is the latest in a series of threats he has received since last year for defending minority rights. The two MPAs are the most senior politicians to receive death threats for defending minority rights since the 2011 assassinations of Punjab Governor Salmaan Taseer and Federal Minorities Minister Shahbaz Bhatti.

Saleem Khursheed Khokhar made a complaint about the threat, the day he received it, to the Station House Officer at Clifton Police Station in Karachi and a First Information Report (FIR) was registered. However, Saleem Khursheed Khokhar told Amnesty International, and wrote to senior government officials, that the police had failed to investigate the threat beyond registering the FIR. He believes the handful of security guards assigned to him by the authorities are too few and have not been adequately vetted to ensure they bear no animosity towards him, as they are Muslim and he is Christian. In January 2011 Governor Taseer was murdered by one of his own security guards who believed Taseer had committed blasphemy by speaking out against laws that are often used to target religious minorities. Minister Bhatti was also assassinated, over his own criticism of the issue, in March 2011. Saleem Khursheed Khokhar received death threats last year for supporting Taseer and Bhatti.

The Pakistan government has repeatedly failed to respect and protect the human rights of religious minorities and those who have defended their rights. Police frequently fail to sufficiently record and investigate complaints, and justice is impeded by judicial bias against religious minorities. In 2009, a year after coming to power, the current government pledged to review "laws detrimental to religious harmony." But it fell silent after the assassinations of Governor of Punjab Salmaan Taseer, and Federal Minorities Minister Shahbaz Bhatti in January and March 2011 respectively because of their criticism of blasphemy laws that disproportionately target religious minorities.

Under Articles 18 and 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Pakistan is a state party, everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion, opinion and expression. Article 26 provides for equality of all people before the law, without discrimination. Article 27 provides that members of ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities "shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion, or to use their own language." This article requires the state to take positive measures to protect religious minorities against acts committed by the state or by non-state actors.

Name: Saleem Khursheed Khokhar and Pitamber Sewani

Gender m/f: m

Further information on UA: 139/12 Index: ASA 33/007/2012 Issue Date: 1 June 2012