

URGENT ACTION

POLITICIAN THREATENED, AS DEFENDS MINORITIES

Regional parliamentarian Saleem Khursheed Khokhar has received death threats over his calls for Hindu women and girls to be protected from abduction and forced conversion to Islam.

Saleem Khursheed Khokhar, a Christian, is a member of Pakistan's Sindh Provincial Assembly and President of the Sindh chapter of the All Pakistan Minorities Alliance. On 18 April, after Supreme Court hearings into the possible forced conversion and forced marriage of a Hindu woman, Saleem Khokhar spoke to the media criticising the abduction and forced conversion of women from religious minority communities. Two days later, he 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. He is the most senior politician to receive death threats for defending minority rights since the 2011 assassinations of Punjab Governor Salmaan Taseer and Federal Minorities Minister Shahbaz Bhatti.

Saleem 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 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 Khokhar received death threats last year for supporting Taseer and Bhatti.

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

- Urgently provide Saleem Khursheed Khokhar and his family with adequate protection and ensure the guards they provide are properly vetted;
- Promptly investigate all threats received by Saleem Khokhar and his family, 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 28 JUNE 2012 TO:

Prime Minister
Syed Yusuf Raza Gilani
Prime Minister House
Islamabad,
Pakistan
Fax: +92 51 922 1596
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
E-mail:
addl.igp_karachi@sindhpolice.gov.pk
Salutation: Dear Mr Shah

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



URGENT ACTION

POLITICIAN THREATENED, AS DEFENDS MINORITIES

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Hindu student Rinkle Kumari disappeared from her home in Mirpur Mathelo, Sindh province on 24 February. Later that day her parents received a phone call from a local Muslim cleric claiming Kumari had converted to Islam. By that evening she had been married to a local Muslim man. Relatives claim Kumari was forced into the conversion and marriage. The Supreme Court intervened in the case and on 18 April ordered that Kumari and two other girls allegedly forcibly converted and married to Muslim men be allowed to decide whether they wished to remain with their husbands or return to their families. It also ordered that they be provided with police protection. They were kept in a shelter during court proceedings but there were reports that they were threatened by phone. All three women said they wished to remain with their husbands. However, human rights activists criticized the Court for expecting the women to make an immediate decision while ignoring the general climate of fear and intimidation faced by religious minorities, especially disadvantaged sections of the Hindu community in Sindh province.

Saleem Khursheed Khokhar received the death threat after his statements in support of Hindu relatives of the three women following Supreme Court hearings on 18 April. The Kumari case received significant media attention in Pakistan and highlighted the fears of human rights abuse faced by Pakistan's Hindu community. Along with the threat of forced conversion and forced marriage faced by Hindu women, Hindu traders have been targeted in a string of abductions for ransom in Sindh and neighbouring Balochistan province. According to the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, since 2011 up to 34 Hindus have been kidnapped from Balochistan and a further 50 families have fled the province.

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

Gender m/f: m

UA: 139/12 Index: ASA 33/004/2012 Issue Date: 17 May 2012