

Martyr Shahbaz Bhatti Memorial Fundraiser Dinner 2020

March 6, 2020

International Christian Voice (ICV) hosted its 4th annual Shahbaz Bhatti Memorial fundraiser Dinner in support of Pakistani asylum seekers and refugees on the ninth martyrdom anniversary of Martyr Shahbaz Bhatti. The event was held at Chateau Le Jardin in Vaughan, Ontario, Canada. Attendees included dignitaries from the federal, provincial, and municipal governments, as well as Canadian human rights activists, and members of the local community.



The Master of Ceremonies for the evening was Dr. Colin Saldanha, a family physician with a distinguished public service record in the Region of Peel and beyond. Rev. Paul Estabrooks, founding director of Open Doors Canada said the opening prayer.



Hon. Michael Tibollo, MPP for Vaughan-Woodbridge, was the evening's first speaker. He highlighted the important work that ICV does in assisting refugees with private sponsorship to Canada and pointed to the strength that such work provides in building vibrant multicultural communities.



Mayor Patrick Brown then addressed the audience, stressing the need for more action on the challenges to religious freedom being faced across the world and also in Canada. He gave homage to Martyr Shahbaz Bhatti, calling him a true champion and crusader for the religious liberties of all. Mayor Brown also thanked ICV for keeping Shahbaz Bhatti's legacy alive and spoke of initiatives he has taken in the city of Brampton to do the same by naming a public park after him and proclaiming March 2, 2020, as a day of remembrance and action on religious freedom.

Member of Parliament for Brampton North, Ruby Sahota, also addressed the audience and expressed her gratitude to ICV for organizing another successful fundraiser dinner and congratulated them for their efforts in keeping Shahbaz Bhatti's legacy alive. She also brought greetings from Prime Minister Justin Trudeau who thanked all attendees for supporting this worthy cause and encouraged ICV to keep up their work in sponsoring vulnerable refugees around the world.





MP Garnett Genuis, Shadow Minister for Multiculturalism, brought greetings from the Official Opposition and highlighted the important work of privately sponsoring refugees who have fled religious persecution. He also commended ICV for keeping Shahbaz Bhatti's legacy alive and spoke of the importance of building upon the work left behind by martyrs such as him. He also emphasized the need for the government to provide more opportunities for private citizens to sponsor asylum seekers and refugees.

Deacon Rudy Ovcjak from the Archdiocese of Toronto's Refugee's Office said grace for dinner. Retired Pakistani Major and ICV volunteer, Javaid Rahim Bakhsh, provided an overview of ICV's activities and accomplishments over the last year, which included a presentation at the Geneva Summit on Human Rights and Democracy, sponsorship success stories, and awareness-raising efforts.

The keynote speaker for the program was internationally renowned human rights activist, lawyer, professor, and former Justice minister and attorney general of Canada and Chair of the Raoul Wallenberg Centre of Human Rights Irwin Cotler.

Mr. Cotler spoke of the need for the international community to come together and be united



in the defense of religious freedom and fundamental human rights. He highlighted the significant influence that Martyr Shahbaz Bhatti has had on himself and on defenders of human rights advocates around the world, sharing that many have gained great inspiration from his legacy and sacrifice. He also committed to helping Pakistan's religious minorities in partnership with the community in Canada to bring justice, equality, and dignity to Pakistan's religious minorities.

ICV's Chairman, Peter Bhatti, gave a word of thanks to all attendees, supporters, donors, and well-wishers, saying that organizing such an event would not be possible without the support of all those involved. He also thanked the special guests in attendance for their commitment to the cause of religious freedom in Pakistan and around the world and pledged to continue highlighting the plight of persecuted religious minorities.

International Christian Voice then presented two main donors and supporters with plaques of appreciation: first to Weston Road Pentecostal Church for 15 years of ongoing support, and second to Christ Church for their contribution towards sponsoring several Pakistani refugees from Thailand. There were also performances given by local community musicians and singers



