

International Christian Voice Commemorates Pakistan National Minorities Day

On August 11, 2021, International Christian Voice (ICV) held a virtual event commemorating the National Minorities Day of Pakistan in Canada to acknowledge to highlight the unflinching contribution of the Christian Community in the establishment, nation building and progress of Pakistan.

Over one hundred participants joined in from Canada and across the globe from the US, UK, Italy, Netherland, Malaysia, Thailand, and Pakistan.

Our guest speakers who graciously honored our community included Federal Member of Parliament Hon. Ruby Sahota (Lib Party), Federal Member of Parliament Hon. Garnet Genus (PC Party shadow minister international development and Human Rights), Ms. Raheel Raza Canadian Journalist and Anti-Racism Activist, Allama Syed Sheryar Abdi an Islamic Scholar, Mohammad Amanullah Human Rights Activist in Australia, Mr. Waqar Gillani Pakistani Journalist.

Mayor of the host city of Brampton, His Worship. Patrick Brown who spoke by a recorded video message. From our Hindu community in Pakistan we also received a recorded video message for the Minority Day Virtual event. <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1014980392665740>

The event started with a prayer by our local Christian Community Pastor, Rev Emis Daniel, praying for the Lords blessings for the safety and prosperity of Pakistan and its people.

The facilitator for the virtual event was Major. Javaid Rahim Bakhsh (retd) who in his introductory statement reminded that it was Martyr. Shahbaz Bhatti who led the campaign to have Aug 11 declared as a National Minorities Day for it was on this day in 1947, on the eve of independence, that the father of the nation, Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah had declared to the constituent assembly and to the world that "We are starting with the fundamental principle that we are all citizens, and Equal citizens of One State".

ICV Chair. Mr. Peter Bhatti in his opening address highlighted the significance of this day in the history of Pakistan. The founding father, Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah had in his historic speech to the Constituent Assembly categorically said, "You are free; you are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other place of worship in this State of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed that has nothing to do with the business of the state." <https://fb.watch/7px85yRuzM/>

Since the formation of Pakistan, minorities have been contributing to every sphere of life and their political involvement is also worth appreciating. The day is dedicated to the minority communities, who played a constructive role in the Pakistan Movement.

International Christian Voice each year celebrates this day in Canada with a large gathering from Pakistani heritage. However, this is a second year, due to the Pandemic restrictions and guidelines, International Christian Voice limited this year's activity to messages of solidarity with the people and government of Pakistan.

Mr. Peter Bhatti reminded us that the Minorities Day provides us with an opportunity to renew the pledge for the promotion of tolerance and interfaith harmony as in a pluralistic society. It is worth mentioning that Shahbaz Bhatti pioneered interfaith initiatives. He built bridges. He launched a network of "district interfaith harmony committees" to encourage dialogue and unite communities through common concerns.

Hon. Garnet Genus Federal MP and PC party shadow minister for International Development and Human Rights spoke on the importance of defending religious freedom both at home and in Pakistan. He assured that he will always stand firm on religious freedom and speak out about the various abuses that have impacted minority communities in Pakistan. He said we have

proposed a number of new policies that will strengthen Canadian engagement on International Human rights issues. <https://fb.watch/7pFHxVOeTB/>

Following a brief viewing of a recorded national “Tarana” sung by a Christian group our next guest speaker Hon. Ruby Sahota Federal liberal MP expressed her solidarity with the Pakistani Canadian Christian Community. She reminded that regretfully over time governments do not place emphasis on religious freedom as they should. She assured her full support for religious freedom and said that she is working to bring to Canada a few individual cases close to the heart of ICV. Hon. Ruby Sahota congratulated ICV for their continued advocacy for rights and freedom here and abroad and ICV work is making Canada a better place and the world a better place. <https://fb.watch/7py4UdSQzM/>

Ms. Raheel Raza a journalist and Anti-racism activist began by reminding us that when Pakistan was made in 1947 the minorities made up 15% of the population and that reflected in the White strip on the national flag, but, sadly today combined the minority faith population is less than 4%, so what happened? Years of persecution, injustice, discrimination, and application of draconian religious laws led to mass exodus of religious minorities. She said “When I was growing up in Pakistan the best schools were administered by Christians, and I did my school and college education in a convent I am proud to say. Today we are grateful to the Christian Community for providing the most valuable and honorable form of service, which is nursing, but sadly today the nurses are also being persecuted” She expressed her concern over the growing anti-Christian sentiments in Pakistan. Ms. Raheel Raza also condemned kidnapping and forced conversions of young Christian and Hindu girls. Raheel Raza concluded by proposing suggestions. The international community must be empowered to take action. Harsh religious laws must be suspended. Non-Christians must band together and speak out against these atrocities and the religious leaders coming together to talk about commonality and peace. Raheel acknowledged and commended the pivotal role played by Christians in the Pakistan movement. <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=888158482135563>

Following Raheel Raza a well-known Islamic scholar with a large following, Allama Syed Sheryar Raza Abdi expressing his sentiments. In a light note he said sometimes I say even Muslims are minority in Pakistan. If one sect or school of thought of Islam doesn't accept the other as Muslim, then who is Muslim? We are all first human beings then anything else.

In my interaction with scholars of other faith traditions I always stress that a clash of religions is dangerous for all religions. Examples of persecution of religious minorities in Pakistan, India and Burma and other places killings in the name of religion is dangerous even for the concept of God.

It is unfortunate that whenever someone speaks up minorities victims they are also branded as blasphemous. I myself have been subjected to these accusations of blasphemy when I spoke up for the Christians of Pakistan.

Allama Abdi highlighted how the Canadian government and the Canadian people stood by the Muslim community after that tragic terrorist attack that killed a Muslim family of four. He also highlighted how the Prime Minister and the people of New Zealand embraced the Muslim community after the terrorist attack in Christ Church. We have to learn these lessons from them and do same for our minorities of Pakistan.

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=544692190104398>

Other speakers included Mr. Amanullah a Human rights activist from Australia and Mr. Waqar Gillani a Journalist from Pakistan.