



ORDO FRANCISCANUS SAECULARIS

Consilium Internationale

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Feast of the Stigmata of St. Francis of Assisi

Mr. Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani,  
Prime Minister of Islamic Republic of Pakistan,  
Islamabad,  
Pakistan

On behalf of the Secular Franciscan Order (SFO) and the Franciscan Youth (YouFra), I am writing to express our strong opposition to the human rights violations that are currently being experienced in Pakistan because of the existence, application and abuse of the so-called blasphemy laws within your country.

The Secular Franciscan Order is a Catholic organization of over 400,000 members, present in 110 nations across the world, and which also includes Franciscan Youth (YouFra), present in 49 nations with more than 50,000 members. The Secular Franciscan Order and Franciscan Youth strongly oppose the situation that is currently being faced by religious minorities in Pakistan. Our Order is present in Pakistan, and is deeply concerned about the beatings and killings of individuals as well as the destruction of homes and entire villages.

Secular Franciscans across the world, together with all people of good will, are called to build a more fraternal and evangelical world so that the kingdom of God may be brought about more effectively. Secular Franciscans are committed to be bearers of peace, which must be built up unceasingly, and must continually seek out ways of unity and fraternal harmony through dialogue, trusting in the presence of the divine seed in everyone and in the transforming power of love and pardon (SFO Rule, Articles 14 and 19). With this in mind, the Secular Franciscan Order deplors the fact that blasphemy laws are undermining the notion of freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and serving as a catalyst in promoting a culture of intolerance within Pakistan.

Out of its deep concern for those who are suffering and the desperate situation of many experiencing discrimination, the Secular Franciscan Order urges the Government of Pakistan to take the following actions immediately:

- To remove all provisions of discrimination on the basis of religion that is part of its Constitution, laws and State policies;
- To repeal its blasphemy laws;

- To urge local governments, particularly those where populations have been affected, to take the necessary steps to prevent further violent attacks, paying particular attention to the vulnerability of minorities; and
- To ask Provincial governments to investigate and prosecute those responsible for the attacks on minorities; and take urgent steps to ban and forfeit printed material, books and audio-visual materials containing hate speech.

The Secular Franciscan Order is fully supportive of the joint statement submitted to the United Nations Human Rights Council by Franciscans International, Pax Christi International, Pax Romana, and Dominicans for Justice and Peace (attached).

The Presidency of the International Council of the SFO has already expressed its solidarity with the brothers and sisters of Pakistan and, in conformity with its own spirituality, has exhorted them to be instruments of peace, reconciliation and mercy towards those who are experiencing great sufferings at this time. Likewise, the International Council of the Secular Franciscan Order and the Franciscan Youth has exhorted all its members to respect those brothers and sisters who profess other faiths, as well as their sacred rites and books. For all of these reasons, I urge you, the political leaders of your country, to take stronger steps to redress the human rights violations being experienced by religious minorities in Pakistan, especially Christians, including members of the Secular Franciscan Order.

Best and hope-filled regards on behalf of all my brothers and sisters in the world,

Encarnación del Pozo  
General Minister, Secular Franciscan Order

cc Mr. Inderyas Sardar, Secular Franciscan Order National Minister, Pakistan  
Sr. Denise Boyle, Executive Director, Franciscans International