

Chapter 11 | RELIGIOUS PLURALISM AND INTERFAITH HARMONY

Having predominantly Muslim population, Pakistan also has followers of various other religions, castes and creeds. Pakistan recognizes equal rights of all citizens. The Articles 20, 21, 25, 26, 27, 28, and 36 of the Constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan provide full protection and equal rights to all citizens including Minorities to freely profess and practice their religion and culture.

According to the 1998 census, 95 per cent of the population is Muslim while the rest five per cent of the population includes Christians, Hindus, Parsis/Zoroastrians, Bahais, Sikhs, Buddhists, and small portions of Kalash, Kihals, and Jains. This diversity signifies the need of a pluralistic society in which people with different beliefs live with peace and harmony with each other.

The existing scenario stresses upon more inter-faith dialogue to promote culture and religious understanding and tolerance in the society. Collective efforts are needed to combat all forms of hatred, intimidation, incitement and acts of violence that emerge as a result of intolerance based on religion or belief.

The Plan envisages promoting peace, harmony and tolerance among all sects of the society and recognizes existence of religious and social diversity in the country, and offers a strategy to promote the inclusive society. The government is cognizant of the issues of minorities, the need to protect their life and property. Towards this end, there is need of making concentrated efforts to improve the socio-economic conditions of minorities.

Performance review 2016-17

Many initiatives have been taken for empowerment of minorities and promotion of religious and cultural pluralism and interfaith harmony;

- The Pakistan Penal Code – 1860 provides a complete chapter i.e. Chapter XV on offences relating to the religion.
- Ten seats have been reserved for representatives of minorities in the National Assembly and 4 seats in the Senate. Similarly, 23 seats have been reserved for minorities in all the provincial assemblies
- Allocation of 5per cent Job Quota for minorities in all federal government services/jobs in addition to their participation on the open merit basis.
- Declaration of 11th of August as a “Minorities Day” to recognize the services/sacrifices and contributions of minorities in the nation-building

- Celebration of Ten (10) religious festivals of minorities at official level in Pakistan in a year, including Christmas/Easter for Christians, Holi/Diwali for Hindus, Biasakhi/Birthday of Guru Nank for Sikhs, Nauroze for Zoroastrian, Eid-e-Ridvan for Bahai's, Festival of Lights for Buddhist community and Chelum Jhust for Kalash people.
- In emergency crises faced by minorities in different areas of the country, financial help of Rs300,000 to Rs500,000 is extended to the victims and their family members.
- Grant of financial assistance through Minorities Welfare Fund (MWF)
- Marriage Grant of Rs50,000 for marriage of daughters of widows/orphan girls of minorities.
- Religious tourism promoted.

Various initiatives have been taken by the governments to promote peace and harmony, which include putting ban on hatred speeches, publishing and distribution of hatred literature and enforcing rightful use of loud speakers. Other initiatives taken by the Provinces to promote religious pluralism and interfaith harmony include allocation of Rs780 million for 4 schemes in the ADP of Punjab, allocation of Rs2,580.84 million for 12 schemes in Sindh, allocation of Rs220.89 million for 10 schemes in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan Government's allocation of Rs20 Million on 2 projects related to minorities rights.

Outlook 2017-2018

Religious pluralism and interfaith harmony in the country under a consistent framework would be developed in consultation with national and provincial stakeholders for equitable development of communities of all religions.

Programmes

Various initiatives for attaining interfaith harmony in the country have been envisaged in the Plan period. These include a project proposal "Construction of Interfaith Community Center in Islamabad" for promoting peace, mutual acceptance and tolerance. The exclusive arrangements would be made for reporting cases of discrimination against minorities. The Plan would also sensitize / envisage launching of a help line for helping minorities and promoting religious tourism.