

Press Statement

The Justice and Peace Workers moot demands addressing key human rights issues in Pakistan

The 6th Justice and Peace Workers meeting of Asia was held in Rawalpindi from the February 6 to 11, 2005 under the auspices of the Catholic National Commission for Justice and Peace of Pakistan. Besides visiting village communities, slums and organizations working for education and human rights, the participants were part of discussions on the main theme "Pakistan in the Changing Global Scenario". The participants of the meeting hailing from Hong Kong, South Korea, Japan, Sri Lanka, Singapore, Afghanistan, Philippines and Pakistan joined by representatives of Justice and Peace Commissions from Oceania, Europe and Pax Christi International.

The participants from different countries had opportunity to exchange views with relevant government bodies during meetings at the Ministry of Religious and Minority Affairs, as well as with the National Commission on the Status of Women of Pakistan.

We were encouraged to note that the government had introduced certain initiatives with regard to the human rights. However, considering that implementation of human rights standards remains a big challenge due to customary practices, obscurantism and stringent laws made in the past.

At the conclusion of our meeting we would like to recommend the following steps in order to improve human rights conditions in the country.

We call upon the government of Pakistan to control violence and discrimination against women, improve conditions for the labour and political participation of the masses of Pakistan and take concrete steps to meet the Millennium Development Goals, e.g. quality education for all, safe motherhood and elimination of extreme poverty by 2015.

We also urge the government to seek by all means a peaceful resolution of ongoing conflicts, including the current tension going on in Baluchistan. Besides these general recommendations we urge the government to take following concrete steps for the protection and promotion of human rights:

- a) We call upon the government of Pakistan to restore joint electorate for local bodies elections and ensure preparation of joint and common electoral list to eliminate religious discrimination in the political order.
- b) Regarding the status of women we call for the implementation of all recommendations made by the National Commission on the Status of Women in 2003, including repeal of Hudood Ordinances that are responsible for enhanced violence against women.
- c) Regarding Blasphemy Laws we call upon the government to repeal Sections 295-B & C, 298-A, B & C of Pakistan Penal Code, which have been evidently misused and are cause of human rights violations.
- d) We stress upon the need for instituting a Permanent and Independent Commission for Minorities, which should be empowered to address the complaints and provide speedy redress.

e) We encourage the government to formulate a concrete program for the elimination of bonded labour and implementation of broad based agricultural reforms, including fixing minimum wage for the agricultural workers, providing land to tillers and landless peasants the opportunity to own land through government schemes.

f) We are concerned about the plight of women domestic workers who are often exploited and harassed. We call for an appropriate legislation to protect their rights.

In our commitment with people of Pakistan, the civil society and in particular the National Commission for Justice and Peace, we encourage all efforts for a more just and peaceful society.

+Archbishop Lawrence J. Saldanha
Chairperson
National Commission for Justice and Peace

February 10, 2005

Participants' name	Country	Signed
Sr. Filo Hirota	Japan	
Fr. Francis Fukamizu	Japan	
Mr. Masataka Nagasawa	Japan	
Ms. Regina Pyon	South Korea	
Ms. Chandanie Watawala	Sri Lanka	
Sr. Janet	Sri Lanka	
Ms. Linda Noche	Hong Kong	
Ms. Lina Chan	Hong Kong	
Sr. Lina Amante	Philippines	
Sr. Pilar Unggay	Philippines	
Ms. Charito J. Pinalas	Philippines	
Mr. Sinapan Samidorai	Singapore	
Mr. Victor Scheffers	Netherlands	
Mr. Sebastian	Netherlands	
Mr. Jef Felix	Belgium	
Mr. David Tutty	New Zealand	
Fr. Emmanuel Yousuf	Pakistan	
Mr. Peter Jacob	Pakistan	
Fr. Bonnie Mendes	Pakistan	
Mr. Alwin Murad	Pakistan	
Bro. Philip Heera	Pakistan	
Mr. Mehboob Sada	Pakistan	
Fr. Nisar Barkat	Pakistan	
Ms. Rubina Feroze	Pakistan	
Mr. Samson Joseph	Pakistan	