



ORDO FRANCISCANUS SAECULARIS

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Prot. N. 9/11

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

Dear Sir,

As Saint Francis of Assisi liked to do, I greet you with the words: The Lord give you peace!

I am writing to you again, on behalf of the Secular Franciscan Order and Franciscan Youth (YouFra) throughout the world, to express our indignation regarding the assassination of Shahbaz Bhatti, Minorities Minister of the Federal Government of Pakistan. Please accept our condolences and allow us to express our deepest sympathy for your loss.

We were aware of the firm position taken by Minister Bhatti against the blasphemy law in force in Pakistan, a law which openly violates human rights in general and the rights of minorities, especially Catholics living in Pakistan, who are subject to constant discrimination and violence. The Secular Franciscan Order deplores the fact that this law is a threat to freedom of thought, conscience and religion and serves as a catalyst in promoting a culture of intolerance within Pakistan.

We feel that the assassination of Minister Bhatti is a further confirmation of the long road that your country still has to travel before attaining that democracy and respect for human rights in general, and for the human rights of minorities in particular, which are present in the formal declarations of the government. If it can be of comfort to you in this difficult period of transition, please rest assured that we are close to you in prayer.

In view of this worrisome situation, the Secular Franciscan Order urges the Government of Pakistan to take the following actions:

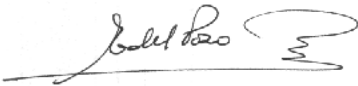
- To investigate the assassination of Minister Shabbaz Bhatti and to prosecute his assassins;
- To support and bring to a conclusion all the actions that he had undertaken in favor of minorities;
- To remove all provisions of discrimination on the basis of religion from your Constitution, laws and policies;
- To repeal the blasphemy laws that are currently in place within your country;

- To urge local governments to take the necessary steps to recognize the rights of minorities and to take stronger steps in defending them against the arrogance of the powerful;
- To ask Provincial governments to urgently take the necessary steps to ban and forfeit printed material, books and audio-visual materials which promote religious and racial hatred.

The Presidency of the International Council of the SFO has already expressed, on this sad occasion, 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 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, and the political leaders of your country, to take decisive action so that this tragic event can become a point of departure for the building of peace within your country and mark the end to the violation of human rights being experienced by religious minorities in Pakistan, and especially by Christians. May this sad occasion open the hearts of all Pakistani people to a future that is filled with peace, brotherhood and harmony.

On behalf of all my brothers and sisters from around the world, I extend my best regards and hope-filled wishes.



Encarnación del Pozo
Minister General
Secular Franciscan Order