



FAITH MATTERS

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Christian – Muslim Covenant of Non-Violence in Pakistan

Preamble

When Quaid-e-Azam Muhammed Ali Jinnah founded Pakistan he stated:

'We have many non-Muslims – Hindus, Christians, and Parsis – but they are all Pakistanis. They will enjoy the same rights and privileges as any other citizens and will play their rightful part in the affairs of Pakistan'.

Evidently, although Muhammed Ali Jinnah acknowledged that Pakistan would be a state with a majority of Muslims, he did not foresee that the minority non-Muslims would be any less Pakistani or any less entitled to a life free from persecution and violence. Unfortunately, recent years have seen violence used by Pakistanis against Pakistanis, not only by some of one religion directly against another, but also indiscriminately.

Pakistani Muslims and Christians have long worked together, bringing prosperity to the country for all. Christian parents have seen the benefits of sending their children to Islamic schools and likewise, Muslim children have studied in convents and Christian institutions. It is now time to bring these two religions together for an even greater good.

As Christians and Muslims we respect and adhere to common ethical morals as laid down by our God, which we follow through our faiths. Therefore, we propose that it is the responsibility of those who identify and associate themselves with either Islam, the largest religion in Pakistan or Christianity, the largest minority religion in the country, to educate and demonstrate to others that there is no place for violence on our streets, in our places of worship, in our schools, or even in our homes as we watch the news.

We propose the key elements below that need to be addressed.

Key Foundations of the Covenant

The condemnation of violence

We believe it is the responsibility of all citizens to demonstrate why and how their religion condemns the use violence. Violence appears in many forms; verbal, physical, small scale and large scale, but is never justified. It is the responsibility of all to argue against those who legitimise the use of violence whether on a personal scale or a larger scale for social change and most importantly, to illustrate the countless occasions where violence is condemned in our Holy texts.

Tackling why some resort to violence

Not always, but often, violence is used as a tool for social change when voices are not being heard. We must ensure that Pakistan as a democracy gives a voice and that all have the right to free, fair and competitive elections regardless of their religious affiliations. Moreover, violence suggests intolerance and we believe that the message of tolerance needs to be driven in partnership with politicians in Pakistan and civil society. Pakistanis have been through tremendous struggles in the last 64 years and have not given up. This partnership approach to supporting interfaith dialogue and the resourcing of it is essential in ensuring the rights of faith communities and in overcoming barriers in reducing the dehumanization of groups of people. The key resource that makes up Pakistan and its future are its people. They are its lifeline and its source of social, spiritual and economic nourishment.

The Promotion of interfaith existence

At a time when there are pressures within Pakistan, interfaith and joint dialogue activities can reduce mistrust and ensure that voices of reason come to the forefront with partners from other faiths. Pakistan was founded on the protection of all of its citizens and its minorities and these minorities make up the identity of the nation however violence is committed through hate and ignorance. By instilling interfaith as a core part of our society, such labels and prejudices can begin to be overcome and we can begin to know one another. This is why tried and tested activities like interfaith can make a difference in promoting peace and dialogue in the name of the Almighty. Pakistanis should not live separate from those who follow another faith. We call on Mosques and Churches to run interfaith activities and exchange days to one another's places of worship and religious schools to exchange and construct activities with schools that follow another religion.

We therefore hope that this covenant provides some basis of a framework which we as individuals, as citizens, as mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers and as people who care about the future of the country, can come together and build a better future. If any country deserves a brighter and better future it is the country built on the following ideals of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammed Ali Jinnah:

"The great ideals of human progress, of social justice, of equality and of fraternity..., constitute the basic causes of the birth of Pakistan and also... (provide) limitless possibilities of evolving and ideal social structure in our State. I reiterate most emphatically that Pakistan was made possible because of the danger of complete annihilation of human soul in a society based on caste. Now that the soul is free to exist and to aspire it must assert itself galvanizing not only the State but also the Nation." (Public Meeting, Chittagong, 26 March 1948)

Signatures