

**Session: Europe and other regions of the world**  
**Wilton Park-London Speech by**  
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Good morning ladies and gentlemen, it is a privilege for me to be here among you to talk on the topic of religious freedom. The cause of religious freedom is one that has changed my family's lives and mine forever.

When my late brother Shahbaz Clement Bhatti, then Federal Minister for Minorities in Pakistan, was killed, I never thought that I would work in Pakistan after setting up my medical practice in Italy. I would have been compromising personal and professional freedoms that I enjoyed. That being said, one month before Shahbaz's death, we had a very significant discussion and he asked me to come and work in Pakistan. I thought he was joking at the time and replied: "You are calling me from paradise to hell." He immediately replied: "The way to paradise lies in Pakistan." His strong, unwavering conviction and discussion with me always was that non-involvement is not an option; we are obligated being one human family to struggle for those who are too weak to speak and defend themselves.

After the death of Shahbaz I had a choice to either continue the life I had in Italy, or to follow up his vision and mission to continue the task he had set for himself. My conscience left me in no doubt; I decided to carry on his mission, protecting those whose basic human rights are too often violated because of discrimination, extremism and religious hatred. Consequently, I took up the role of Federal Minister of National Harmony and Minority Affairs in the Pakistan Government, as well as the Chairmanship of All Pakistan Minorities Alliance (APMA). This was established by my late brother with the aim of ensuring that all religious minorities have a voice on one platform. Simultaneously, I established the Shahbaz Bhatti Memorial Trust, so that the legacy of my late brother would continue to promote religious freedom, human equality and social justice.

I am so thankful to you all for undertaking this important task of assessing situations of religious freedom around the world. Nobody should have to suffer physical violence and psychological intimidation for declaring what they hold dear and adhere to. Religious freedom is a right and a responsibility that involves everybody; all of us are entitled to express our beliefs, respecting the faith of each other.

I am grateful to Wilton Park and collaborators for organizing these workshops, which surely challenges people to think afresh about this fundamental right, which is central to a free, fair and flourishing society. It is the most critical need of the moment in a divided world where, in some parts there is a religious revival and in others, a trend towards religious indifference and atheism. In an increasingly polarized world, a growing consensus about the nature of and respect for religious freedom could prove crucial in our struggle against fanaticism and a culture of violence, be it by the State, extremists or by terrorist groups.

In my country Pakistan, religion is often hijacked to promote sectarian violence, religious intolerance, discrimination and terrorism. Every day we face the cruel and harsh realities of losing precious innocent lives, affecting and impacting people from all sectors of society, from lawyers, judges, law and order forces, military officials besides those wrongfully accused and their families

are among these innocent victims. This has led to political instability, economic crisis thus creating a vicious circle that has crippled the whole of our society.

There have been many incidents of homes that were looted, damaged or burnt to the ground. These atrocities took place after false blasphemy accusations.

On November 3rd 2014 a Christian couple, Shama, a brick kiln worker who was seven months pregnant, and her husband Shahzad, were attacked by a mob of 500, they were brutally beaten and tortured. When they tried to run away they broke their legs, then they were dragged behind a cart, and taken to a kiln to be burnt alive. This was over allegations of committing blasphemy. Their children aged 2 and 4 years old, witnessed the whole carnage.

Then December 16th 2014 an attack on military public school killed 145 people including 132 school children. This massacre shocked the entire nation to the core.

Earlier, May 3rd 2013, Chaudhry Zulfiqar Ali, the Federal Investigation Agency Chief Prosecutor in the late Shahbaz Bhatti and late Benazir Bhutto, murder cases, was shot dead in broad daylight in Islamabad. The Islamabad Police had subsequently arrested from a local hospital an injured Abdullah Umar, son of Lt Col (R) Khalid Mahmood Abbasi, who confessed to killing Zulfiqar Ali along with four of his accomplices. While Abdullah was seriously injured after Ch Zulfiqar's guards returned fire during the attack, another assailant, Harris Khan, was killed in the cross fire and was buried by his aides in the lawn at Adil brothers house in Rawalpindi.

Despite growing awareness and promotion of interreligious dialogue we continue to confront terrorism and religious extremism, resulting in innocent victims who are powerless and outnumbered.

The persistently high levels of poverty, illiteracy and disparities in life styles and well being in developed and underdeveloped countries are root factors contributing to the situation. Extreme poverty leads to suffering, loss of hope, lost opportunity and a sense of grievance, all of which continue to undermine our peace and stability.

There are millions of children in different age groups in underdeveloped countries that do not attend school. This deprives them of their right to education and prevents them from reaching their full potential. All this creates a fertile environment for groups with a certain ideology to actively invite children to study in certain institutions, brainwashing them with an ideology to live, kill and die in the name of religion. They don't have any other objective in life than to defend and live for this specific ideology. We need to respond by improving access and the quality of good schooling and the right kind of education, wherever and however possible.

The alternative is disparities in education influenced by multiple factors such as wealth, gender, ethnicity, geographic location, low early learning opportunities and generally low quality of learning. We are convinced that the role played by educators is pivotal to the inherent success of any educational programme bringing effective change for the future. How and what is taught, including the 'hidden curriculum' or that which is modeled, though not deliberately taught, deeply influences whether children appreciate and respect ethnic and religious diversity, or view their minority fellow negatively as valueless aliens in their own country. We know that, if instilled early in life, these

negative attitudes resist change and contribute to the disintegration of the social fabric of communities, to discrimination, and finally, to sectarian violence.

Tackling poverty and building stable, prosperous and democratic societies will not only help millions of affected people in the world, but will also improve stability and peace in the world. It is imperative that we promote freedom of religion and values beyond childhood. We know that societies are more likely to flourish when its citizens have the freedom to voice their deepest beliefs and highest ideals. At least 90% of the world populations are religious believers. Therefore, more than ever, there is a growing need for dialogue and relationship between religious communities.

The growing numbers of religious minorities in some countries are considered a threat for the majority and often this fear potentially triggers aggressive reactions from some extremist groups. Consequently, discrimination with acts of violence can be seen within several sectors of life in different societies, especially in underdeveloped countries. It certainly affects the marginalized oppressed and those least influential who cannot retaliate or speak for themselves.

Real acts of violence and discrimination are inspired by extremist ideologies. A particularly concerning result of such discrimination against oppressed and marginalized is decreased access to justice for the poor. This has frightened religious minorities of my country leaving them on several occasions powerless. Behind such cruel realities there are complex phenomena's, which clearly need to be identified and addressed.

The continuing atrocities, sufferance and deprivation of justice has reached a point where it has become inevitable that a strong, integrated united approach with immediate, mid-term and long-term measures needs to be in place to protect, and save the lives of innocent victims as well as creating an environment where every human being can live with dignity in peace without fear.

To overcome the growing instances of atrocities and injustices we would appeal for the following: • A rapid emergency assistance service must be in place, to protect and assure the safety of victims. Further, this service must come into action immediately to ensure justice is taking its course at the right time, in the right place and at the right level • To design and promote peace building activities; in communities, schools, media, work and worship places at a national and international level, that will help in giving birth to a peaceful society • Conferences, workshops, seminars and training, focusing on human equality, basic rights and respect for all faiths at all levels of society but especially at the grass root level in areas where acts of violence and discrimination are frequent • Programs for understanding minorities' rights to promote a peaceful coexistence among diverse faith traditions • Media campaigns with messages, which are easily understandable emphasizing human dignity, basic human rights and respect for all faith traditions • Curriculum reform in our education system, introducing the subjects of human dignity and basic human rights and tolerance of all faith traditions • Networking with intra-community and inter-community organizations having similar goals to extend and intensify peace-building work

This is part of the work to which we are committed to carry on, which was the legacy that was passed on to me from my younger brother the late Shahbaz Bhatti. I am convinced that a united and integrated support from all of you will make our dream a reality bringing peace in my nation and an end to fear and violence.

In closing, I would like to offer my thanks to the European Union, European Parliament, US Commission on International Religious Freedom for their ongoing involvement in Freedom of Religion or Belief, to solve the problems affecting us.

Further, I would like to extend my special thanks to the Canadian Government's commitment and initiative with the Office for Religious Freedom and their active participation in our struggle that has brought encouragement to all of us and would appeal for others countries to follow their example.

Thank you