



## **Blasphemy laws used to justify 'murder': EU parliament**

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**STRASBOURG: The EU parliament on Thursday called on Pakistan to guarantee minority rights, claiming that its blasphemy laws could be used to murder members of political, racial and religious minorities.**

In a resolution adopted in Strasbourg, the assembled Euro MPs expressed “deep concern” at the Pakistani blasphemy laws, calling for a “thoroughgoing review” of the legislation which is “open to misuse.”

The laws can carry the death sentence and are “often used to justify censorship, criminalisation, persecution and, in certain cases, the murder of members of political, racial and religious minorities,” the parliament said in a strongly-worded statement.

The texts in question “are misused by extremist groups and those wishing to settle personal scores,” the EU deputies said.

They had also “led to an increase of violence against members of religious minorities, particularly Ahmadis, but also Christians, Hindus, Sikhs, Shiites, Buddhists, Parsis, Bahais and critical citizens who dare to raise their voice against injustice,” they added.

The parliament did recognise recent “measures taken in the interest of religious minorities,” by the Pakistan government, such as establishing a quota of five per cent for minorities in the federal jobs sector, recognising non-Muslim public holidays and declaring a National Minorities Day.

The chamber also welcomed the commitment made by Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani to grant property rights to minority slum dwellers in Islamabad and the government's undertaking to provide minority seats in the Senate.

However such initiatives cannot mask the reports and surveys by independent agencies which “reveal that minorities in Pakistan are deprived of basic civil liberties and equal opportunities in jobs, education and political representation,” the parliament underlined.

The resolution also criticised the practice of including religious details on citizens' passports, a practice which the MEPs argued could lead to “discriminatory practices. Present in Strasbourg was Pakistan's minorities minister Shahbaz Bhatti.

He told AFP that his country was “trying to improve the situation and many steps have been taken.” He said the Pakistani authorities had made a “commitment to amend these laws.”

“These laws will be changed in such a way which could not be harmful. I’m working on that, this will be done by the end of this year,” he said.

Pakistan on Thursday condemned caricatures of the Prophet Mohammad that appeared on Facebook, blocking the social networking site and YouTube in a growing backlash over Internet “sacrilege.”—AFP

<http://www.dawn.com/wps/wcm/connect/dawn-content-library/dawn/news/world/16-blasphemy+laws-eu+parliament-hs-02> (Accessed on 21<sup>st</sup> May, 2010)

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# Pakistan Observer

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## **It is vital to see Pak in positive light: EP**

Bhatti's visit hailed  
Staff Reporter

Islamabad—MEP Ioannis Kasoulides, Vice President of the European Peoples Party warmly welcomed Pakistani Minister for Minorities Mr. Shahbaz Bhatti in Strasbourg on Tuesday says a report from EP headquarters.

The EPP is the largest and most influential European level political party of the centre/right, which currently includes 72 member parties from 39 countries, the President of the Commission, Council and Parliament, 14 EU and non-EU Heads of State and governments, 14 members of the European Commission and having 256 members of the European Parliament, says a press release received from Brussels here today.

Mr. Kasoulides found Minister Bhatti's visit highly important before the debate and resolution on Thursday. "It is now important to see Pakistan in positive light," Mr. Kasoulides said when he expressed appreciation for the initiatives taken by Minister Bhatti for interfaith harmony, religious freedom and rights of minorities. MEP Eija-Riitta Korhola, a long time friend of Pakistan and Chairwoman of First Step Forum, pointed out how important it is to give support to Pakistan in its fight against terrorism.

Minister Bhatti explained steps taken by the Government of Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani to strengthen democracy, peace and harmony.

Minister Bhatti will meet during the next days key people in the Parliament and speak to hundreds of members of the European Parliament about the policies of the Pakistani government and Interfaith Harmony initiative.

This initiative is getting international attention and creates a positive image of Pakistan.

Later during his first day Minister Bhatti also met with the Chair of South Asia Delegation MEP Ms. Jean Lambert from the UK Green party and with MEP Laszlo Tökes from Romania, who is a highly respected political leader in Romania. Ms. Lambert and MEP Tökes both expressed their appreciation for the work of Minister Bhatti and acknowledged the steps taken by the Pakistani government.

Minister Bhatti, while talking to the EPP leadership, said that Pakistan wants to develop multi-faceted relationships with the EU and welcomed the commitment of the EU to strengthen its engagement with Pakistan.

He also stressed the need for more high-level exchanges between Pakistan and the EU, including parliamentary delegations.

<http://pakobserver.net/detailnews.asp?id=31806> (Accessed on 21<sup>st</sup> May, 2010)



## Press Release

20/05/2010

### **Religious Freedom in Pakistan: Minority Minister Bhatti's message welcomed by the EPP Group. Eija-Riitta Korhola MEP and Mario Mauro MEP**



Pakistan's Minister for Minority Affairs, Shahbaz Bhatti, visited the EPP Group and the European Parliament as the Members were about to adopt a human rights urgency Resolution on Religious Freedom in Pakistan on Thursday 20 May. The Resolution underlines the situation of religious minorities in Pakistan, and pays attention to the positive steps already taken, such as creating the mandate of the Minister for Minority Affairs.

Initiator of the Resolution, Eija-Riitta Korhola MEP, who had invited Minister Bhatti to the European Parliament, praised the Pakistani Government's commitment to promoting tolerance and combating fundamentalist extremism. "What is most interesting to me is that the Government believes that the fight against terrorism cannot be done solely by weapon and force, but by changing attitudes. They have asked a good question: how to change the heart and mind of the people - and their answer is; by promoting human rights, by building understanding and dialogue between different religions", she stated.

Addressing the EPP Group, Minister Bhatti gave an overview of the human rights situation in Pakistan, and outlined the measures the Government has taken to improve the situation of religious minorities. He also stated that the Pakistani Government is fighting terrorism wholeheartedly and is committed to de-rooting terrorism from Pakistani soil. The Government is also fighting underlying reasons for terrorism, such as unemployment, poverty and illiteracy. He concluded by calling for a strong partnership between the EU and Pakistan.

In his response to Minister Bhatti's address, the Head of the Italian Delegation (PdL) in the EPP Group, Mario Mauro MEP, underlined, that the European Parliament Resolution on Religious Freedom in Pakistan welcomes the measures taken by the Pakistani Government in the interest of religious minorities. "The meeting with Minister Bhatti represents one of the most important events for the EPP Group in the framework of its strategy for defence of freedom of religion in the world. We firmly support the work of those who promote dialogue and reconciliation and who put their lives in danger for this objective", he said. Furthermore, he underlined the importance of a stable, ongoing dialogue with Pakistan and the EU.

*Notes to Editors:*

*The EPP Group is by far the largest political group in the European Parliament with 265 Members.*

<http://www.eppgroup.eu/press/showPR.asp?PRControlDocTypeID=1&PRControlID=9386&PRContentID=16120&PRContentLg=en>

(Accessed on 21<sup>st</sup> May, 2010)