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REQUEST TO UNHCR TO REVIEW THE GUIDELINES ABOUT THE PAKISTANI CHRISTIANS REFUGEES MATTER

Wednesday, 8 October 2015

The European Federation for Freedom of Belief (FOB) **supports Lord David Alton's request addressed to UNHCR - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees - to review the guidelines about the Pakistani refugees matter.**

According to Lord Alton, the UNHCR is denying the existence of an ongoing *persecution* against Pakistani Christians, reducing such dramatic situation to a case of simple *discrimination*.

As a result of such assumption the UNHCR action in regard to Pakistani Christian refugees wouldn't necessarily be a top priority compared to the initiatives taken in respect of those refugees acknowledged as victims of an actual persecution.

The latest US Department Report on Religious Freedom, issued in 2015, pictures, in respect of Pakistan, a scenario that cannot be described as discriminatory, but in fact persecutory: the number of people that are killed and the brutality of the methods employed cannot just be ascribed to dynamics of mere stigmatization; instead they can be labelled as acts of religious persecution.

The intensity of the actions as described by Lord Alton illustrates a country where not only resident Christians are denied equal opportunities, but also a place where their lives are at serious risk.

FOB hopes that Lord Alton's official request receive a prompt and positive response from UNHCR.

Lord Alton's letter to FOB (European Federation for Freedom of Belief)

Subject: Persecution of Pakistani Christians

Apologies for bothering you but I wonder whether you might consider asking UNHCR to re-examine their policy statement which states that that Pakistani Christians do not suffer persecution. This inevitably affects their ability to be resettled in other countries.

During meetings with UNHCR which I held in Bangkok last week (where more than 4,000 Pakistani Christians have fled) this was cited as a reason for not prioritising Pakistani Christians for interview and resettlement. Some have been told that they will not be resettled until 2020.

Evidence sessions which I held (see these links: <http://davidalton.net/2015/09/06/evidence-taking-sessions-with-pakistani-christians-september-2015/> <http://davidalton.net/2015/09/04/international-scandal-of-95-detainees-held-in-one-cell-including-children/>) entirely contradict the classification of events in Pakistan as "discrimination" rather than persecution.



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Failure to process applications leaves them liable to arrest and during a visit to a detention centre I met some of the Christians held there. It is a scandal that they are held in cells with nearly 100 others crowded in and are having to wait for years for their cases to be examined. UNHCR told me that conditions in the Detention Centres are worse than in Thai prisons.

The British Pakistan Christian Association has commissioned a report entitled “Education, Human Rights Violations in Pakistan and the Scandal Involving UNHCR and Asylum Seekers in Thailand” - co-authored by Professor Desmond Fernandes and Professor Rainer Rothfuss, two pre-eminent genocide experts.

This report also fundamentally challenges UNHCR’s belief that what is taking place is merely discrimination rather than persecution. If genuine fear of persecution were recognised it would accelerate these cases.

The UN put the number of Pakistani Christian asylum seekers in Thailand, at around 4000. However the German NGO, International Solidarity for Human Rights, estimates a figure closer to 8000.

There are numerous reasons for Christians fleeing Pakistan, including the notorious blasphemy law; the Constitution of Pakistan which encourages inequality and discrimination; large scale bomb attacks and frequent mass mob attacks on Christian communities; untouchable status; and “honour” killings for interfaith marriages.

An alarming and indicative statistic uncovered by the Muslim NGO “The Movement of Solidarity and Peace”, based in Pakistan, states that every year 700 Christian girls are kidnapped, raped and forced into Islamic marriage.

Is it any surprise, therefore, that Pakistani Christians are fleeing their homeland in their droves?

It is simply absurd, and flies in the face of the facts, to suggest that there is no persecution.

If a systematic campaign of bombings, killings, the burning alive of people and their homes, the rape and forced marriage of Christian girls, and a systematic campaign whipping up hatred doesn’t amount to persecution it is hard to imagine what would have to happen before it is described it as persecution.

I do hope you will feel able to ask UNHCR to urgently review the Guidance notes on the classification of Pakistani Christian refugees.

Many thanks,

David Alton
(Lord Alton of Liverpool),

Professor of Citizenship, Liverpool John Moores University,
Independent Crossbench Member of the House of Lords.