



Brussels, 18th of January 2022

---

To mr. Borrell Fontelles, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

Dear Mr. Borrell, dear Josep,

We would like to direct your attention to a couple of saddening events that took place in Pakistan recently. December 3<sup>rd</sup> saw the horrible lynching of the Sri Lankan national Priyantha Kumare at a factory in the Pakistan city of Sialkot. The mob that killed Kumare and set his body on fire acted following accusations of Kumare removing a couple of stickers with Quranic verses from the wall of the factory where he worked as a manager.

Although politicians and leading figures have condemned the lynching in strong terms, we must not overlook how the religious climate in Pakistan, constituted by formal laws and institutions, is conducive to these kinds of horrible violence.

Second, early January 2022, the Pakistani Christian pastor Zafar Bhatti was sentenced to death on charges of blasphemy. Bhatti has been detained since his arrest in 2012, after being accused of sending messages with texts insulting the prophet Muhammad's mother, something which he has denied doing. There have been reports that Bhatti was tortured to force a confession whilst rules in Pakistan from the District Bar Association precluded a defendant of blasphemy charges from the assistance of its lawyers.

Therefore, Zafar Bhatti needed to be assisted by a lawyer provided by an NGO. The appeal that Zafar Bhatti lodged with the High Court against his life imprisonment sentence has been delayed repeatedly and finally referred back to the trial court, as the judge believed the death sentence would be the only appropriate punishment.

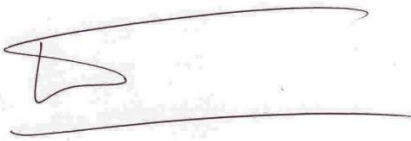
These recent events are another showcase of the lack of religious freedom in Pakistan, as state policies do not only restrict this freedom, for example through blasphemy laws, but also are conducive to a climate of religious hate and intolerance, in which religious minorities such as Christians, Hindus and Ahmadi's are frequent victims.

The European Parliament has voiced its utmost concern about the state of religious freedom in Pakistan in its resolution of 29 April 2021. In this, almost unanimously adopted, resolution, the Parliament also called upon the European Commission to reassess the eligibility of Pakistan for the GSP+-status, which gives the country considerable economic advantage when trading with the EU. However, it is evident that Pakistan does not comply with the requirements that come with this status, especially when it comes to respecting human rights and guaranteeing fundamental freedoms.

Therefore, we ask you to do two things in your capacity as EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. First, could you express your grave disapproval of the events in Sialkot and the verdict on Zafar Bhatti as well as the state-sanctioned religious intolerance in Pakistan in general, in your contacts with the highest levels of the government in Pakistan? Second, will you work together with DG TRADE to make clear to the government in Pakistan that the European Union requires a fundamental change in the country's policies regarding religious freedom, especially the blasphemy laws, if it wishes to maintain its GSP+-status when the new GSP-regulation enters into force in 2024?

We trust that you are committed to keep raising the issue of freedom of religion or belief in your dialogue with the government of Pakistan and look forward to be informed about your findings.

Yours sincerely,



Peter van DALEN MEP (EPP)

MEP Co-signatories:

François-Xavier BELLAMY (EPP)  
Geert BOURGEOIS (ECR)  
Marco CAMPOMENOSI (ID)  
Carlo FIDANZA (ECR)  
Søren GADE (RENEW)  
György HÖLVÉNYI (EPP)  
Ladislav ILCIC (ECR)  
Assita KANKO (ECR)  
Joachim KUHS (ID)  
Ioannis LAGOS (NI)

Miriam LEXMANN (EPP)  
Leopoldo LÓPEZ GIL (EPP)  
Peter POLLÁK (EPP)  
Samira RAFAELA (RENEW)  
Bert-Jan RUISSSEN (ECR)  
Sara SKYTTEDAL (EPP)  
Ivan ŠTEFANEC (EPP)  
Johan VAN OVERTVELDT (ECR)  
Charlie WEIMERS (ECR)  
Željana ZOVKO (EPP)