



NATIONAL COMMISSION
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

JARANWALA: Incident Report

National Commission for Human Rights, Pakistan





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FOREWORD

On 17 August 2023, I travelled with fellow Members of the National Commission for Human Rights to Jaranwala, less than twenty-four hours after a mob tore through the city. We walked through the gutted remains of twenty-two churches and charred rubble of homes that had belonged to Christian families for generations. We met women and men whose lives had been upended overnight. Their grief was quiet but staggering. The economic and psychological toll of the attack will take years to repair—if ever.

As the Chairperson of the Commission, it is difficult to overstate the horror of what we witnessed. The ferocity of the violence, carried out by over 1,200 people, many of them young, was not only unprecedented in scale but deliberate in its targeting. Loudspeakers had summoned the mob. Homes were first looted and then burned. Places of worship, sacred to a persecuted minority, were desecrated in full view.

Police presence was limited and scattered. Peace Committees did not intervene. Investigations since then have been slow and inconsistent. While the state's promise of compensation and reconstruction is welcome, it cannot mask the deeper, structural failures that allowed this to occur.

Faisalabad Division, historically rife with inter-religious tension, has never seen a long-term plan to counter the spread of extremist ideologies among its youth. The violence in Jaranwala did not erupt in isolation. It was enabled by an ecosystem of discrimination that marginalises non-Muslims in every sphere of life. Christians in Punjab make up 60% of the bonded labour population and remain overrepresented in sanitation and low-wage work. From school curricula to employment to public safety, minority citizens are made to feel like pariahs in their own country.

Equally disturbing is the government's failure to implement the 2014 landmark judgment on minority rights authored by Justice Jillani, which called for institutional safeguards to protect places of worship and create special police forces for the security of minority communities. Almost a decade later, the judgment remains largely unfulfilled.

As part of our mandate under Section 9(i) of the NCHR Act 2012, we conducted several visits to Jaranwala to assess the ongoing situation. We wrote to the district administration, met community leaders, and tracked legal developments. With support from the UNDP, we also coordinated the distribution of aid to nearly 100 families, while working alongside religious leaders to ensure transparency.

This report bears witness to all of it. It documents the destruction and the silence that enabled it, but it also outlines a path forward. Chief among our recommendations is the urgent initiation of a national programme to curb rising extremism and to de-radicalise youth, beginning with Faisalabad Division. The Commission also stresses the need for stronger institutional accountability, better legal literacy among law enforcement, and long-overdue

protections for minority communities.

Hate, whether on the street or online, cannot be countered with statements alone. It demands consistent political resolve and structural reform.

Justice cannot be symbolic. It must be real, lived, and felt by those most vulnerable to its absence.



Rabiya Javeri Agha

Chairperson

National Commission for Human Rights, Pakistan

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INTRODUCTION - NCHR

The National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) is a federal statutory body formed through an Act of Parliament. It is an independent National Human Rights Institute (NHRI) with a mandate set up in line with the Paris Principles. NCHR is the outcome of Pakistan's constitutional commitments as well as its international treaty commitments to promote and protect human rights.

NCHR is the apex human rights institute in Pakistan in terms of broadness of scope and multiplicity of functions. The Commission has been granted a wide mandate which encompasses multiple ways and means to pursue its stipulated goals. Very concisely, it is envisioned, inter alia: to monitor, investigate, and hear human rights complaints; act as a watch dog on legislation, set standards, and enable implementation; promote awareness of and act as an advocate for human rights; generate and enable research and data production on human rights; and drive policymaking for human rights protection.

NCHR also has the capacity to advise the Government on Pakistan's commitment to fulfill its international human rights obligations under the seven core international human rights instruments. Pakistan is a signatory to and has ratified: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD).

INCIDENT AUGUST 16TH 2023

August 16th saw the ransacking of the city of Jaranwala in Faisalabad Division, Punjab. Within twenty four hours, a mob of 1200 people, mostly youth had gutted a total of 17 churches and 40 homes with an additional 40 + houses vandalized and partially destroyed. The incident was unprecedented in magnitude and in ferocity against a vulnerable minority community that had been living in the area for decades.



Pictures of the destruction of churches in Jaranwala

NCHR INSPECTION AUGUST 17TH 2023

Upon receiving information about this devastation, NCHR, under Sec 9 (i) of the National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) Act 2012 which empowers NCHR to “direct an investigation and inquiry in respect of any incident of violation of human rights” undertook a visit to the vandalized site. A team led by the Chairperson NCHR, Members, Minorities and Punjab visited the area the next day on August 17th to see first hand, the damage wrought and to meet with district administration, religious leaders and families affected by the terrible attacks.

Team members included: Chairperson Rabiya Javeri Agha, Member Punjab Nadeem Ashraf, Member Minorities Manzoor Masih, Chief Coordinator Ghulam Murtaza Rana, Coordinator Punjab Office Muhammad Khalida and Coordinator Head office Ahsan Kazmi.

In their meetings with the district administration and police, NCHR met the Commissioner, Ms Silwat Saeed, Deputy Commissioner Mr Abdullah Nayyar Shaikh and Assistant Commissioner Jaranwala Mr Abdul Hanan as well as the Regional Police Officer Dr Abid.

NCHR also inspected the gutted churches and met members of the church and affected community who described in detail the dreadful ordeal that they had gone through the day earlier.



A woman whose home had been gutted the day earlier



Chairperson and Team Members NCHR Meeting with the district administration and police



Chairperson and Team Members NCHR's On site inspection

INITIAL FINDINGS OF VISIT

Following are the findings of the NCHR during the visit;

1. The mob consisted of around 1,200 people, mostly young men.
2. A total of 17 churches were gutted in the unfortunate incident in the first instance, (on survey the numbers increased to 22) including 12 registered and 5 smaller, unregistered churches.
3. Some 80 homes had been vandalized and damaged of which 30 to 40 homes had been completely burnt.
4. The Commission was informed that five FIRs under ATA and Sec 324 and 353 PPC had been registered against the miscreants. Some 128 persons were under arrest till that time and police was working to arrest the remaining perpetrators through geo fencing
5. To maintain calm, the administration had imposed Section 144 and 3,500 policemen have been deployed in the area to keep check on the situation.
6. Police strength was limited and scattered
7. The NCHR team was told that 180 rangers had also deputed to control any untoward situation
8. According to the administration, although the Muslim and Christian communities had been coexisting peacefully in the area for decades, recently skirmishes and religious and sectarian issues had begun to crop up frequently.
9. The Commissioner informed that two committees for assessment of damages and inquiry had already been notified and that the Punjab government had pledged to repair all damaged homes and churches immediately. For this purpose Secretary Works & Services Punjab was in Jaranwala for an assessment.
10. According to the local residents, the issue of blasphemy that had sparked the violence was rooted in a financial dispute between two Christian youth and a Muslim businessman/travel agent.
11. Community residents also informed that loudspeaker announcements from local mosques were used to incite religious sentiments and aggravate the already charged situation.

DESTRUCTION OF THE HOMES OF CHRISTIAN RESIDENTS IN JARANWALA

Deeply concerned by the enormous level of devastation at Jaranwala.--the economic costs that would arise in repair and rehabilitation, NCHR was also troubled by the possible long term psychological consequences that could impact an already weak and discriminated minority community.

A sentiment analysis by NCHR and a partner civil society organization B4A revealed that a majority of the posts on twitter and Facebook during the day of the attack contained content that was inciting and inflammatory in nature. In the wake of the mob riot, a surge of approximately one million social media posts targeted minority communities with hate and inflammatory content within 24 hours of the incident. In response to NCHR and B4A reporting Facebook took action by removing the large volume of incendiary content from their platform.



Pictures of the destruction of the homes in Jaranwala

action by removing the large volume of incendiary content from their platform.

In view of the above incident, the spate of hate online NCHR exercised its authority under Section 9 (e) of the NCHR Act 2012 to “review the factors... that inhibit the enjoyment of human rights and recommend appropriate remedial measures” to the government for the promotion and protection of human rights in the country.

As an independent national human rights institution set up in line with the Paris Principles, NCHR penned an open letter to the Prime Minister. This letter outlined the findings of the visit and recommended strategies and policies to be adopted by the government in order to prevent such incidents in the future.

OPEN LETTER TO PRIME MINISTER

NCHR’s open letter to the Prime Minister, both sent to the Prime Minister Office, the Ministry of Human Rights and released through media outlined the following points:

- State authorities must ensure due process of law and speedy convictions to affirm legal deterrence provided in domestic law to all and every citizen of the country regardless of religion.
- Despite the establishment of a comprehensive legal and institutional framework for promotion and protection of human rights, such acts of violence against religious minorities pose serious questions regarding implementation and role of duty bearers.
- Analysis of criminal case-files of minority parties demonstrates numerous problems plaguing police investigations; delays, arrests without probable cause, proceedings in flimsy cases etc. ¹
- Additionally, a comprehensive assessment of attitudes of administrative and justice sectors reveals a lack of knowledge of specific laws relating to religious minority communities as well as an in-group vs. out-group mentality wherein religious minority communities are usually referred to as the ‘Other’. “Arguably, it is this otherization that eventually leads to a denial of rights.” ²
- The Commission acknowledges action by the Commissioner Faisalabad which averted loss of life. It appreciates high level public condemnation of this incident, as well as the commitment of the Punjab Government to repair and compensate affectees, however, it is

¹ <https://www.las.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Access-to-Justice-for-Religious-Minority-Policy-Brief.pdf>

² Ibid.

⁵ Murray,

- It is of concern to NCHR, that the landmark judgement on minority rights by Justice Jillani following the Peshawar Church bomb blast in 2013 has still not been fully implemented by the Government. This includes putting into place safeguards for the protection of places of worship of minority groups and setting up special police forces for their safety.
- Faisalabad has historically been an area of acrimony and disputes amongst religious groups. It is of concern to NCHR, that no long term program has been developed to de-radicalise the youth of the area and to inculcate a culture of religious tolerance.
- Notified Peace Committees and local police of the area lack the strength, efficacy and courage that is needed in tense situations such as that of August 16th.
- It is of concern to NCHR, that 60% of bonded labour in Punjab comprises Christian workers and that 80% non-Muslims are employed in low paid and sanitation work and that systemic discrimination against religious minorities is embedded in the socio-political landscape of Pakistan. This discrimination starts from childhood, continuing into adulthood as minority members struggle to join the workforce, participate in politics, claim basic rights of citizenship, and practice their faiths without fear or intimidation.



RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE GOVERNMENT

In view of the above, the National Commission on Human Rights recommended the following measures to be taken by the Government to address long term challenges arising from extremism and intolerance in society especially against those actions that violate Article 20 of the Constitution of Pakistan- ‘Freedom to Profess Religion and Manage Religious Institutions’.

1. Government machinery be deployed to speedily investigate the incident using latest technology; geo-fencing, CCTV cameras etc (similar to that used in the May 9th investigation) to gather evidence for prosecution.
2. The state, as a party to the prosecution, to assist the courts for early dispensation of justice and follow-up on the later stages of appeal till convictions.
3. Government may consider setting up an independent Tribunal or JIT to inquire into the incident.
4. Establishment of systems of accountability to facilitate and improve investigation. This may be achieved either through District Criminal Justice Coordination Committees formed under the Police Act for instance, or a statutory committee that specifically monitors cases of religious minority communities.
5. Provincial government to immediately fulfill its promise to compensate affected Christian families and start early rebuilding of damaged properties, especially Churches.
6. Initiate a national programme to curb growing extremism and the de-radicalisation of youth, starting with Faisalabad Division.
7. Implement legislations and policies that address dangerous speech and online harassment, ensuring that they adhere to international human rights norms and standards, and effectively deter future instances of hate speech while respecting freedom of expression.
8. Closely revisit the Single National Curriculum through nationwide consultations with religious minority groups so as to remove apprehensions and create emphasis on human rights and citizen’s responsibilities for a more tolerant and responsible society.
9. Develop strong SOPs within administration and police to ensure speedy response and action in such cases or emergencies.
10. Most importantly, call for an implementation audit of the Justice Jillani Judgement SMC1 of 2014 from all federating units. This judgement is a substantive document that sets in place important provisions for the protection of religious minorities.

AID TO THE AFFECTEES

Subsequent to the letter, two weeks after the incident, NCHR in partnership with the UNDP, visited Jaranwala to distribute aid and groceries to families of victims impacted by the mob destruction. Approximately 100 bags of grocery items sufficient to last one month each were distributed to the affectees. The list of affectees was prepared in consultation with the local administration and religious leaders of the Christian community who were also present during the distribution.

Relief packages to families affected in the violence

During the visit, the provincial Authorities and the community leaders of the area informed NCHR that construction work of burnt Churches had been started and would be completed shortly. Furthermore, Rs. 2 million have been distributed to each family affected by the destruction.



Relief packages to families affected in the violence

Follow up

In order to help promote compliance with human rights standards by the government, the NCHR repeatedly visited Jaranwala to determine whether observance of human rights standards had improved or deteriorated since the dreadful incident.

On 29-08-2023 and 04-10-2023 letters were written to the Commissioner, Faisalabad for provision of the following information:

- Total number of victims impacted by the incident .
- Details of Compensation given to each victim/family.
- Updated status of repairs and maintenance of churches and homes
- Details of updated position of arrested persons involved in the incident and action taken to ensure due process of law
- Details of arrested persons
- Steps taken by the local administration to avoid such incidents in the future.

NCHR team again visited Jaranwala on 06-10-2023 and after meeting with district administration and local church leaders submitted the following update/information;

Legal Action Taken included:

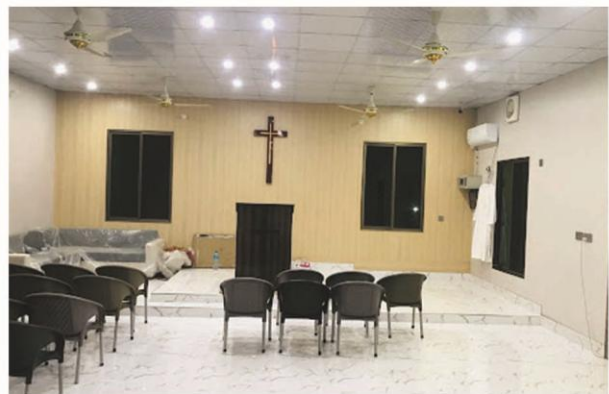
- Total number of FIRs = 22
- Total number of accused = 5221
- Total Number of Arrests: 295
- Total Number of accused under remand (police / judicial):220
- Total number of accused discharged = 41
- Total Number of accused identified in the parade: 75
- 10 Joint Investigation Teams JITs formed for investigation
- Total Number of Christian under arrest: 7
- Mr. Yasin, the man who made the announcements from the mosque is also under

Churches and Houses Damaged/Burnt:

- Twenty-two (22) total number of Churches destroyed
- Eighty (80) homes damaged/burnt by the mob.

Following churches under renovation/construction ;

- Church in Farooq Park.
- Church in 23 GB.
- Church in 120 GB.
- Presbyterian Church
- Total 22 out of 22 churches have been rebuilt/renovated
- All churches have also been provided furniture, fixtures, security cameras & fans
- Complete renovation is expected to be completed within next 15 days
- District administration has also built a boundary wall surrounding the Christian graveyard



Pictures of the churches renovated by the government of Punjab

Compensation to the Affected Families:

- Approximately 80 families/households have been given compensation of Rs 2 million. Money has been paid to the heads of the households.
- Organizations like UNICEF, UNDP, the Islamic Relief Fund, local philanthropists and traders have provided the victims with food, clothing, beds, grants etc.

Measure taken to create deterrence for future:

The administration has taken the following steps to ensure that no recurrence occurs;

1. Regular monitoring of churches and areas where the Christian community is residing.
2. Holding regular meetings of interfaith harmony committees.
3. Regular interaction of Muslims and Christian religious leaders.
4. Conduction sessions and dialogues with the heads of schools and colleges about the sensitivity of the issue and encouraging interfaith harmony
5. Christian students who left their respective schools following the incident were re-enrolled and provided with bags, uniform, books, stationary
6. Signing of Misaq-e-Jaranwala by all stakeholders to pledge for peace in the area
7. Activation of Numberdars at village level to engage, monitor and resolve potential issues of concern
8. Sensitization of police and revenue officers for greater vigilance, response and mobilization in times of emergency and crisis.
9. Engagement and sensitization of teachers on issues of interfaith harmony and tolerance
10. Set up of a helpline to report incidences of concern and complaints facing the community.
11. Establishment of Khidmat Counters

آپ اپنے مسائل / شکایات کے فوری ازالہ
اور کسی بھی قسم کی فوری ہیلپ / ایمر جنسی
کے لئے کنٹرول روم ڈپٹی کمشنر آفس میں
رابطہ کر سکتے ہیں

• کنٹرول روم نمبر۔ 041-9201492 041-9201491
• مال فوری نمبر۔ 0800-00081
• واٹس ایپ نمبر۔ 0300-9667998
• اسسٹنٹ کمشنر آفس جڑانوالہ۔ 041-4312913

A Helpline was setup to report incidences of concern and complaints facing the community.

عبدالحنان خان اسسٹنٹ کمشنر / ایڈمنسٹریٹو سب ڈیویژن / کمیٹی جڑانوالہ
DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FAISALABAD

To create an atmosphere of harmony and tolerance, a walk was arranged by the Muslim and Christian leaders to create awareness about harmony. Last week a Peace Cricket Tournament was held between players from the peace committee, police and press.

Peace Cricket Match

It has also been informed that the Pakistan Ulema Council has formed a high-level committee of 20 members, which includes senior religious leadership from both Christian and Muslim communities. This committee aims to probe the drivers behind such tragedies to identify gaps and recommend measures to address them. Update and reports on the working of this committee have not yet been received.



CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the NCHR condemned in the strongest terms the Jaranwala mob violence. It noted that mob riots and vigilante actions have grown exponentially over the last few years. Incidents of desecration of places of worship, graveyards and open ferocity against members of vulnerable groups have become commonplace--often with impunity.

The Commission stated that In its independent capacity, it would continue to review safeguards provided by or under the Constitution of Pakistan or any other law for the protection of human rights and recommend measures for their effective implementation. It was hoped that the government would look into these recommendations and proactively ensure that each and every citizen- irrespective of religion—is ensured due process of law, justice and a future free from bigotry, hate and violence.



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