

Chair, Foreign Affairs Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

29th May 2024

Dear Foreign Affairs Committee Chair,

We the undersigned are writing to support the recent call made in a letter sent by Aid to the Church in Need for a short inquiry into the UK's foreign policy towards Pakistan in the light of disturbing political developments which have serious implications for security, human rights and the development of a plural, democratic civil society.

We wholly support the proposed terms of reference for the inquiry which Aid to the Church in Need's letter initially recommended:

- What is nature of the UK's current engagement with Pakistan?
- How severely were democratic processes undermined in the recent elections?
- How severe is the discrimination against minorities in Pakistan?
- What effect, if any, has the shifting political situation within the country affected minorities?
- Should the UK re-examine its foreign policy towards Pakistan in light of its political, human rights and security landscapes?
- How is ODA deployed to Pakistan?
- What programmes are the FCDO currently funding in Pakistan?
- Should the UK reconsider its ODA allocations or trade arrangements with Pakistan in light of the current political or civil situations?

The political landscape in Pakistan is becoming increasingly tumultuous, and the unsettling events surrounding the recent elections shows this political instability is now having a devastating impact on the democratic processes of the country. During the election, the Ministry of the Interior suspended phone and internet services throughout the nation, and certain political parties were denied the right to conduct proper electioneering. This has heightened fears among marginalised communities in Pakistan that democracy is at risk of collapse and that the political system is increasingly ignoring and alienating minority groups.

Minority groups, especially religious minorities, are routinely subjected to discrimination and persecution, including mob attacks and psychological intimidation, sexual violence, abduction, forced conversion and forced marriages of minor girls displacement, destruction of property including desecration of sacred spaces. There is also widespread evidence of anti-minority prejudice and mistreatment by the police, discrimination in schools and preclusion from employment prospects. Their literacy level is much lower, which further hinders their chances of getting a better paid job and breaking out of poverty cycle.

This deeply distressing situation is made all the more concerning given the ongoing engagement and support Pakistan receives from the UK; Overseas Development Aid (ODA) to Pakistan is set to triple from £41.54m in 2023-4 to £133m in 2024-5. Whilst a country caught in the grips of such a severe political and human rights crisis rightly shouldn't be denied ODA, it would be irresponsible to continue providing such significant levels of funding without thoroughly examining where and how these funds are deployed, whether the vulnerable minority community members receive any visible benefits from the generous UK aid, whether conditionality safeguarding and promoting human rights is being

adequately and robustly upheld, and whether a percentage of UK Aid should be allocated to the uplift and development of the ignored religious minority members, with an emphasis on the education of girls.


The UK is uniquely placed to work with Pakistan and assist the country's authorities in upholding the rule of law and the most fundamental of human rights and liberties. We believe a short inquiry into UK foreign policy towards Pakistan will go a long way towards examining how best the UK can lend its support, and improve the lives of countless suffering minorities throughout the country.

Thank you for considering this vitally important matter.

Yours Sincerely,



Dr Caroline Hull
National Director,
Aid to the Church in
Need (UK)



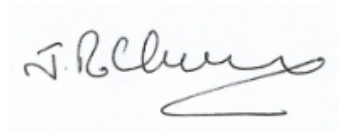
Lord David Alton
The Lord Alton of
Liverpool



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