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The Honorable Sam Brownback  
Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom  
United States Department of State  
2201 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Ambassador Brownback:

Re: Religious Freedom Concerns in Pakistan and its Sindh province

I am writing to voice my concerns regarding the treatment of religious minorities in Pakistan, particularly in the province of Sindh. In January, the U.S. State Department placed Pakistan on a special watch list for "severe violations of religious freedom." Pakistan has been placed on this list because they have infringed on individuals' "ability to adopt, change, or renounce their religion or belief, worship in accordance with their religion or beliefs, or be free from coercion to practice a particular religion or belief."

Various groups in Pakistan, as well as the government of Pakistan, have persecuted and continue to persecute Pakistani citizens for their religious beliefs. Although Pakistan is the only country to have been founded in the name of Islam, significant religious diversity exists in the country, both within and outside of Islam. About 96 percent of Pakistan's population is classified as Muslim, with an estimated 85 percent Sunni Muslim and about 11 percent Shia Muslim. However, this classification does not accurately reflect the beliefs of individuals who reside in the Sindh province and practice Islam. These individuals follow a syncretic religious tradition, which holds great reverence for the shrines of local "Sufi" saints. This religious tradition is not recognized as legitimate by the government of Pakistan, and is treated as an "undesired corruption of Islam." In addition, Pakistan is home to followers of Hinduism (most of whom reside in the Sindh province), Christianity (many of whom reside in the Punjab province), and smaller numbers of adherents to the Baha'i faith, Sikhism, and other religions.

In the Sindh province, Hindus are estimated to be 6.5 percent of the population. This is a mere fraction of the Hindu population that lived in Sindh before the foundation of Pakistan in 1947, when Muslim refugees arriving from India precipitated a mass exodus of Hindus. Hindus continue to leave the Sindh province due to active persecution by the state, as well as deliberate state neglect when Islamic religious extremists target Hindus.

In Sindh, religious minorities are also experiencing persecution in the form of misuse of a so-called blasphemy law, forced conversion of girls and young women, kidnappings and killings of Hindu businessmen, and discrimination in other spheres. The police, the administration, and the courts have failed to protect these victims, in part due to their fear of religious extremists.

I implore you to take a stance against these and other violations of human rights and religious freedom in Pakistan and Sindh.



Brad Sherman

Member of Congress

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House Foreign Affairs Committee