

## PAKISTAN

On 14th August 1947 the last viceroy of India Lord Mountbatten formally transferred power to the constituent assembly of Pakistan. Replying to the address of the Viceroy on the occasion the Quaid e Azam said , "it will be our constant effort to work for the welfare and wellbeing of ALL the communities in Pakistan".

Jinnah set forth the goal of a tolerant, progressive, and inclusive Pakistan in his 1947 speech to the Constituent Assembly. There he said:

*You are free; you are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other place or worship in this State of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed -- that has nothing to do with the business of the State. We are starting in the days where there is no discrimination, no distinction between one community and another, no discrimination between one caste or creed and another. We are starting with this fundamental principle: that we are all citizens, and equal citizens, of one State.*

Yet when Jinnah died in 1948, this vision died with him.

Over the past 60 years, religious dogma has been embedded in the state, sectarianism empowered, and religious discrimination institutionalized.

This tilt began with Pakistan's foundational document—the Objectives Resolution of 1949. Providing the guidelines for constitutions to follow, it set forth specific freedoms for Muslims to live out the faith, as prescribed by the Qur'an and Sunnah, and glossed over festering Sunni-Shi'a differences. Also, instead of bringing non-Muslims into the national fold, the Resolution set them apart, referring to them as "minorities" and promising only "adequate provision" of their needs to "freely profess and practice their religions" (Islamic Research Institute, 2009).

Religious freedom violations in Pakistan rose to unprecedented levels due to chronic sectarian violence particularly targeting Shi'i Muslims. The government continues to fail to protect Christians, Ahmadis, and Hindus. Pakistan's repressive blasphemy laws and anti-Ahmadi laws are widely used to violate religious freedoms and foster a climate of impunity.

Shi'a: Militants and terrorist organizations targeted Shi'i processions and mosques with impunity during the reporting period. Organizations put the number of Shi'a killed across Pakistan over the past year at over 400. Information collected by USCIRF during the reporting period, which is not exhaustive, documented approximately 50 incidents of violent attacks causing death, as well as 10 different attacks with explosive devices or suicide bombers. Shi'a activists have referred to the level and severity of attacks as constituting genocide. The response by the Pakistani government has been grossly inadequate. While at times police were present when attacks occurred, they were unable to stop attackers before people were killed.

<http://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/resources/PAKISTAN%20%20Pager%202013%20final.pdf>

In the last thirty years, ever since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, as a result of which, many seminaries were established and promoted for the purposes of recruitment and indoctrination to fight the Afghan war, there has been a systematic and premeditated genocide of Shias in Pakistan by well-armed and well trained groups such as the Sipah Sahaba and the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi. This genocide has been witnessed and documented by the UN, Amnesty International, Human rights Watch, The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan and various Shia groups in Pakistan and abroad.

They are no accurate numbers, but some online Shia groups have documented 1,200 reported attacks on the Shia community since 2002. More worryingly, whereas thirty to forty attacks took place a year until 2011, in the last three years we have witnessed an average of over three hundred attacks a year. So the rate of killing has gone up exponentially, possibly coinciding with the Taliban gaining a foothold in Pakistans Northern Tribal areas, as well as the groups mentioned above, consolidating their positions after a ban on them in 2002.

Whereas the mainstream print and electronic media has described this as “terrorism”, this is not an entirely accurate or complete depiction of the picture on the ground. The groups who are exterminating Shias are not doing so to pressure the government or the public into accepting any political demands. The aim, for which they were formed, is to fulfill their religious duty to exterminate Shias and to establish a Wahabi state in Pakistan.

These aims have been well documented over the years in many places. Firstly we have multiple Fatwas (religious decrees that are binding on their followers) to this effect. We also have pamphlets and other literature calling for the blood of Shias. The leaders of the organizations I have mentioned above, as well as the clerics of many allied seminaries have spoken publicly apostatizing Shias, which is all commonly available on social media, as well as having played on mainstream television. Furthermore, and most insidiously, the methods employed by the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi are systematic and methodical; to ensure the cleansing of a community. First of all they strike at places of worship. Secondly they target Shia neighbourhoods. Here the Shia Hazara community in the North of Pakistan is most vulnerable, as they live in ghettoised neighborhoods and valleys, and as such have seen the worst of this holocaust. Shias are particularly targeted when travelling together by bus, as that makes for an easy target. And thirdly, and most sinister, prominent members of the Shia community are identified and murdered. In the last year alone seventy Shia doctors were assassinated. Many more have left the country and sought asylum. So there is no ambiguity as to who is behind the genocide of Shias and what their motivations are. What’s more, these groups have proudly taken responsibility for many attacks and promised more.

Once it is established that someone deserves to die on the basis of religious differences, it doesn’t take long before a religiously mandated cleansing of Shias transmogrifies into genocide of all minority communities. And that is what is happening in Pakistan, at an increasing rate.

Ahmedis and their places of worship have been attacked; Christian communities such as Gojra and Joseph Colony have been burned to the ground. Churches have been bombed all over the country, Hindu temples burned. The Blasphemy law is just one instrument in this bloodletting. If Aasia Bibi had been a Muslim woman there would not have been such a fracas over the issue, as there hasn't been in the case of Junaid Jamshed, a pop star turned television evangelist who made some offensive remarks on television, or Khalid Chishti, a cleric who desecrated the Holy Book himself, and placed the evidence to falsely accuse a twelve year old Christian girl. The blood lust we see in Pakistan today is for the minorities.

I have many Christian friends and it is sad to see that the current generation, more often than not, give their children Muslim names so as to prevent a life of discrimination. Right here we see the erosion of a cultural identity.

As I mentioned earlier, there is a complete denial of this genocide in all mainstream media. This is despite the fact that the Genocide Convention of 1948, to which Pakistan is a signatory, describes even the intention, the incitement, the attempt or complicity in genocide as part of the crime. We do, however, know there is nothing new about this denial. Experience from most theatres of genocide, including Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur, shows that there is always reluctance on the part of society to acknowledge this crime. The reason for bringing in these comparisons is to show that Pakistan fits a pattern of behavior that is quite typical of theatres of genocide, such as the classification of communities, dehumanisation, ostracisation, organising and arming against them, the preponderance of hate material, and an apparent immunity to law. In the case of Pakistan, in addition to these warning signs, we also have the death of thirty thousand Shias.

According to an eye witness testimony, "The way they've killed us it will be centuries before these scars heal. Centuries. If they ever do". I am hoping the APPG on Religious Freedom will amplify the voices of the defenceless minorities.

## **IRAQ**

The recent developments in Iraq have given rise to new challenges to global security. The creation of so-called Islamic State by bunch of ruthless terrorists from ISIS an offshoot of Al-Qaida has made the terrorism imminent to reach our soil. ISIS now controls from Aleppo, in Syria, to areas west of Baghdad, in Iraq—a territory that measures the size of Jordan. It is shocking and unfathomable that we remained idle as an Al-Qaida's offshoot terror group was able to capture such a large territory, slaughtering thousands of people including Sunni, Shia, raping women and making people to flee their homes while our counter-terrorism policy revolves around the efforts to defeat Al-Qaida around the world and to prevent creation of terrorist safe havens, such as the one Al-Qaida enjoyed in Afghanistan, that enable terrorists to attack the West.

Western leaders and politicians joined Arab monarchs in lambasting Iraq's Nour-ul-Maliki for not sharing power with minority Sunni community and marginalizing them. Iraqi prime minister must involve the representatives, Sunni speaker of parliament and other ministers holding important positions in the cabinet in decision making, there is no doubt about it but while echoing the voice of Arab monarchs, we should not turn a blind eye to what these Arab autocrats are doing to minorities on their home soil either.

Two dozens of dissidents calling for rights and democracy have been killed by the Saudi security forces in the oil-rich eastern province of Qatif in Saudi Arabia, where 2 million of Shias live. Approximately 30,000 are behind bars for being critical of the regime and a number of have been handed capital punishment or life-imprisonment. Shias suffer from extreme policies: They have been excluded from the nation through eliminating them from many political and governmental middle and senior positions. Even more, the space for their religious freedom was extremely violated; their religious books are banned from entry to Saudi Arabia, establishing an independent Shiite judiciary as well as religious schools is prevented, building Shiite mosques outside Qatif and AlAhssa is prohibited, and even Madinah which is inhabited by more than seventy-thousand Shiite citizens since Islam's emergence still lacks for mosques and community halls for performing religious rituals.

The situation in Bahrain is exactly the same where the seventy percent of population is consisted of Shias but it has been ruled by a Sunni monarchy for over two hundred years. The prime minister has been in position of premiership for forty years – a unique premier on the planet. The Shia has long been demanding for democracy and equality. In the first quarter of 2011 they rised up against the regime but the peaceful movement was quashed by Bahrain security forces backed forces from Saudi Arabia and UAE. Since then over 150 anti-regime Bahrainis have been killed, over one thousand people including, medics, para medics, women and children have been arrested arbitrarily, detained and severely tortured. A number of people have been sacked from the low scale position for joining the anti-regime protest. Rights activists, political activists and political leaders are apprehended. Mosques have been demolished. Any sorts of Rallies are banned. Bahrainis too suffer from the same policy of alienation, the list of discrimination against and suppression of Bahrain's Shias is a long one. For example, they have barred from reaching middle and senior positions in the government, prohibited to join security forces in Bahrain, to name but two.