

Pakistan: Letter to Powell

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Contact:

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WASHINGTON - The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has written Secretary of State Colin Powell to convey its serious concern for the safety and well being of Mr. Shahbaz Bhatti, President of the All-Pakistan Minorities Alliance. The Commission also urged Secretary Powell to raise the case of Mr. Bhatti with the highest authorities in Pakistan and to request assurances that the Pakistani Government will take the necessary measures to protect him, as well as remove him from the "Exit Control List" which prevents him from traveling outside of the country.

The USCIRF recently hosted a visit by Mr. Bhatti to the United States, where he met with Commissioners, numerous Members of Congress, and leading officials in the Administration. Upon his return to Pakistan, Mr. Bhatti reports that he has received many threats against his life because of his advocacy on behalf of religious freedom.

"Mr. Bhatti has been one of the most outspoken critics of extremist views in Pakistan. The United States must stand with advocates like him who are working against hatred and intolerance," said Commission Chair Michael K. Young.

The text of the letter follows:

Dear Secretary Powell:

On behalf of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, I am writing to convey our serious concern for the safety and well being of Mr. Shahbaz Bhatti. As President of the All-Pakistan Minorities Alliance, Mr. Bhatti is a vocal advocate for religious liberty and other human rights in Pakistan. Mr. Bhatti represents religious minorities throughout Pakistan with the goal of establishing "social justice for the creation of a society free of all discriminations."

Our Commission recently hosted a visit by Mr. Bhatti to the United States, where he met with our Commissioners, numerous Members of Congress, and leading officials in the Administration.

Upon his return to Pakistan, Mr. Bhatti reports that he has received many threats against his life because of his advocacy on behalf of religious freedom. In August, Mr. Bhatti reports that an attempt was made to kill him. In a recent phone call to Mr. Bhatti, he was reportedly warned that he "will be punished severely" if he does not stop talking about the issues of religious freedom and persecution in Pakistan. Following his visit to the United States, Mr. Bhatti has now been placed on the Government of Pakistan's "Exit Control List," and he is not permitted to travel outside of the country.

On behalf of the Commission, I urge you to raise the case of Mr. Bhatti with the highest authorities in Pakistan and to

request assurances that the Pakistani Government will take the necessary measures to protect him. I urge you to make it clear to the Government of Pakistan the importance the United States places upon Mr. Bhatti's safety. I also ask you to request that Mr. Bhatti be removed from the "Exit Control List" and that he be free to travel abroad.

Religious extremists would benefit from silencing Mr. Bhatti and his message of tolerance and respect for minority religious beliefs. Mr. Bhatti is on the front lines against extremists and he deserves the full support of the Administration.

Thank you in advance for your attention to this pressing matter.

Sincerely,

Michael K. Young

Chair

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