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The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) renews its call for justice for Shahbaz Bhatti, Pakistan's slain Federal Minister for Minorities Affairs, and a longtime religious freedom advocate who was assassinated a year ago today by the Pakistani Taliban.

"Shahbaz Bhatti was murdered on March 2, 2011 for daring to oppose Pakistan's blasphemy law and defending the rights of Pakistan's religious minorities," said [Leonard Leo](#), USCIRF chair. "Despite Bhatti's being a cabinet member, the Pakistani government has done virtually little to investigate the crime and bring the perpetrators to justice. The United States and the international community must press Pakistan on this case, so that every Pakistani knows that people who commit violence will be held to account and that individuals can stand for religious freedom without risking their lives."

The only Christian in Pakistan's federal cabinet, Bhatti was assassinated outside his mother's home in Islamabad. Tehrik-i-Taliban, commonly known as the Pakistani Taliban, claimed responsibility. Bhatti had received multiple death threats, including those from Tehrik-i-Taliban, because of his advocacy against the blasphemy law. The investigation into his murder has made little progress, with initial efforts focused on the Christian community and financial disputes with Bhatti's family. The government did not issue an arrest warrant until December 2011 for Pakistanis residing in the Persian Gulf. No one currently is in custody: all of those arrested for suspected involvement have been released.

“Statements reportedly made by some government officials that Bhatti’s assassins were not the Pakistani Taliban are preposterous. The Pakistani Taliban explicitly took credit for assassinating Shahbaz who was killed for his religious freedom advocacy. Pakistan’s government must end this charade and bring the real killers to justice,” said Leo.

“The culture of violence that grips Pakistan threatens both Muslims and members of minority religious communities, and the very foundation of that society. Pakistan’s government must find the resolve to bring the killers to justice and repudiate the culture of impunity that has plagued Pakistan,” said Leo. “Failure to do so reinforces USCIRF’s recommendation that Pakistan be designated a ‘country of particular concern’ for its egregious violations of religious freedom.”

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