

112TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. RES. 141

Expressing condolences for the murder of Punjab Governor Salman Taseer and Pakistan Minister of Minority Affairs Shahbaz Bhatti, and calling for a Taseer-Bhatti Resolution in the United Nations Human Rights Council honoring their courage in defense of core principles of Pakistan's democracy, enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, particularly the freedom of religion.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MARCH 3, 2011

Mr. FRANKS of Arizona (for himself, Mr. CLEAVER, Mr. SHULER, Mr. DUNCAN of South Carolina, Mr. PITTS, Mr. DANIEL E. LUNGREN of California, Mr. AKIN, Mr. LAMBORN, and Mr. MCGOVERN) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs

RESOLUTION

Expressing condolences for the murder of Punjab Governor Salman Taseer and Pakistan Minister of Minority Affairs Shahbaz Bhatti, and calling for a Taseer-Bhatti Resolution in the United Nations Human Rights Council honoring their courage in defense of core principles of Pakistan's democracy, enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, particularly the freedom of religion.

Whereas two respected Pakistani officials—Punjab Governor Salman Taseer and Pakistan Minister of Minority Affairs Shahbaz Bhatti—were both murdered for their advocacy on behalf of religious freedom for people of all faiths

throughout Pakistan on January 4, 2011, and March 1, 2011, respectively;

Whereas both Taseer and Bhatti were actively opposed to the death sentence handed down to Asia Bibi in November 2010 for insulting Islam and called for amendments to the blasphemy laws;

Whereas blasphemy laws under section 295(c) of the Pakistan Penal Code carry the criminal penalties of life imprisonment and the death penalty and have led to increasing acts of harassment and violence against Pakistani citizens, thousands of whom have had cases filed against them often on the basis of false accusations and with little recourse or justice;

Whereas according to the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, “Blasphemy laws have been used against members of religious minorities and dissenters within the majority Muslim community, and frequently result in imprisonment on account of religion or belief and/or vigilante violence.”;

Whereas more than 30 people have been killed by lynch mobs after being accused of blasphemy in Pakistan since the law was adopted in 1979 and perpetrators are seldom brought to justice;

Whereas Bhatti decried recent attacks by extremist groups on religious minorities saying they allowed intolerance and violence to perpetuate itself;

Whereas only days before he was murdered Taseer warned on Twitter: “I was under huge pressure 2 cow down b4 rightist pressure on blasphemy, Refused. Even if I’m the last man standing.”;

Whereas the United Nations has repeatedly endorsed blasphemy laws through annual “defamation of religions” or “vilification of religions” resolutions that call for member states to take measures to prevent criticism of religion;

Whereas Pakistan has been the main sponsor of resolutions through the Organization of Islamic Conference at the United Nations since 1999 which attempt to provide an internationally recognized legal justification for their existing blasphemy laws;

Whereas according to the Department of State’s 2010 International Religious Freedom Report on Pakistan, discriminatory legislation and the Government’s failure or delay in addressing religious hostility by societal actors fostered religious intolerance, acts of violence, and intimidation against religious minorities;

Whereas specific laws that discriminated against religious minorities included the anti-Ahmadi provisions of the penal code and the blasphemy laws which provided the death penalty for defiling Islam or its prophets;

Whereas according to the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, “Blasphemy laws empower states against their citizens, protect ideas rather than individuals, and engender violence by condemning peaceful speech. While proponents of the ‘defamation of religions’ resolution and blasphemy laws say they are needed to defend the honor of vulnerable religious believers, in reality they only achieve more violence by creating a culture of impunity where the state officially sides with extremists.”; and

Whereas recalling that Muhammad Ali Jinnah, founder of the Republic, in an historic speech before the constituent assembly in 1947 urged citizens to worship as they choose

and stated, “You may belong to any religion or caste or creed—that has nothing to do with the business of the State.”: Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved*, That the House of Representatives—

2 (1) calls on the Secretary of State and the
3 United States Permanent Representative to the
4 United Nations to introduce a “Taseer-Bhatti Reso-
5 lution” in the United Nations Human Rights Coun-
6 cil advocating the repeal of blasphemy laws and con-
7 demning their adverse effects on freedom of religion
8 and thought and to continue to work to defeat pas-
9 sage of the annual “defamation” resolutions intro-
10 duced by the Organization of Islamic Conference;
11 and

12 (2) calls on the President to initiate a dialogue
13 with the Government of Pakistan to address the
14 blasphemy laws, including engaging in a bilateral re-
15 view of—

16 (A) the compatibility of all blasphemy leg-
17 islation with the universally recognized freedom
18 of religion with the intent to repeal or amend
19 such incompatible legislation;

20 (B) the actions against those who make
21 claims of blasphemy that have incited violence;

22 (C) how the Government of Pakistan pro-
23 tects individuals like Taseer and Bhatti and can

1 establish an early warning mechanism to pro-
2 tect all citizens from calls to violence; and

3 (D) the burden of proof used to allow citi-
4 zens to file claims of blasphemy against other
5 citizens and whether such claims need to meet
6 a certain threshold of evidence before being
7 filed, education provided the general public on
8 the rights of religious minorities in order to cre-
9 ate a climate of religious tolerance.

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