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Civil society protests to demand minority rights

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Civil society representatives gathered in front of National Press Club to condemn the desecration and burning of 36 churches, numerous Holy Bibles, as well as estimated 800 houses, businesses, vehicles and valuable possessions in Christian colonies in Jaranwala.

Gathered on the call of Aurat Foundation, the protesters were holding placards and chanted slogans to demand protection for all minority groups. They condemned the Jaranwala incident and urged authorities to ensure speedy justice and exemplary punishment for the perpetrators. CEO Aurat Foundation Naeem Ahmed Mirza demanded the Supreme Court to take suo moto notice of the incident. "Its unfortunate that courts are prioritising the hearings of political issues instead of providing due relief to the general public and ensuring their human rights," he said while urging the religious leaders to spread the true message of Islam which emphasizes on providing protection and justice to minorities and vulnerable groups.

Eminent human rights activist Tahira Abdullah said that Jaranwala incident is not the only incident after the amendment in Blasphemy Law in

1985. "There are many such incidents recorded after that and every such gruesome incident happened for an agenda," she said while quoting the Islamic history when during Nujran agreement, the Christine delegation stayed and performed their prayers in Masjid-e-Nabawi. A charter of demand prepared by the protestors called upon the Senate to totally reject the Commission on Minorities Bill 2023 railroaded through by the National Assembly on the last day of its tenure with mala fide intent – it has omitted all the clauses and language recommended by Minority rights representatives and human rights activists over the past 3 years of consultations. It is particularly unjust, unequal and unfair about Minority women and diverse minority religions representation.

The charter also called for setting up a new Statutory Permanent Autonomous Commission titled National Commission for Minority Rights, adhering to the Paris Principles (similar to Pakistan NCHR and NCSW laws enacted by Parliament). It also demanded ensuring the implementation of the SCP's orders in the historic landmark judgement on Minority Rights of June 19, 2014 rendered by then-CJP, Hon. J. Tassaduq Hussain Jilani – required to be carried out by federal and provincial gov-

ernments and legislatures.

"We call upon the elected federal government (post-elections-2023) to repeal the law ref. "Single National Curriculum" (sic) formulated and enacted with mala fide intent - it has omitted critically important suggestions by progressive education and gender experts, academics and Minority rights representatives," states the charter. The protest also called for strong legislation to prevent the kidnapping, forced conversion to Islam, forced marriage, rape and illegal detention of young Minority girls (especially Hindu girls in Sindh, Christian girls in Punjab and Kalaash girls in Pakhtunkhwa), from initially being carried out to subsequently being mostly condoned by the LEAs and judiciary.

The charter demanded for credible minority representation in preparing draft legislation pertaining to Minority Personal Laws and registration (births, marriages, divorces, deaths, etc.) and accuracy in Census and numerical surveys of religious Minorities, and their prompt public dissemination. The protestors also called upon the Pakistani people (especially religious influencers) to stop using hateful language and speech against all religious, sectarian and ethnic minorities.