

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 25, 2013

The Honorable John Kerry
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Secretary Kerry:

We write today with concerns about Pakistan's ongoing infringement of religious freedom and attempt to disenfranchise specific religious groups in its upcoming general election.

The Pakistani government has "demonstrated a trend toward deterioration in respect for and protection of the right to religious freedom," according to the Department of State's (DOS) most recent International Religious Freedom Report. The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has echoed these findings in its 2012 Annual Report, noting that the Pakistani government "continues to both engage in and tolerate systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of freedom of religion or belief."

As your Department has reported, the Pakistani government's abuse of religious liberty has the effect of fostering "intolerance, acts of violence and intimidation, and a sense of impunity" among the population. Amidst this backdrop of government-sanctioned religious oppression came reports last month that the homes of more than 100 Christians had been torched in Lahore. This violent spree reportedly began in response to allegations that a Pakistani Christian had violated Pakistan's blasphemy laws, making offensive remarks regarding the Muslim prophet Mohammed.

Pakistan's lack of respect for religious freedoms has also pervaded its voting rights policies. As you know, Pakistan will hold general elections in May, marking the first time in its history that a democratically elected government will peacefully pass power to another through elections. Unfortunately, Pakistan's electoral system discriminates on the basis of religion, requiring each citizen to fill out a form stating his or her religious affiliation.

Perhaps no group of Pakistanis is impacted more by this discrimination than Pakistan's four million Ahmadi Muslims, whose very right to vote has been taken away. According to the USCIRF's 2012 report, "because Ahmadis are required to register to vote as non-Muslims ... those who refuse to disavow their claim to being Muslims are effectively disenfranchised from participating in elections at any level." This pernicious discrimination will certainly mar Pakistan's elections, if it is allowed to continue. However, there is still time for Pakistan to change course before the May elections and rescind the presidential order that drives this policy.

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Many in Pakistan have suffered under this religious oppression, and the United States has a duty to support their cause, while also strongly condemning such abuses. Therefore, we urge you to speak out strongly against these practices and call on President Asif Ali Zardari to remove all discriminatory religious-based voting restrictions prior to the upcoming May elections. Pakistan's elections cannot be free and fair unless its entire electorate is able to participate.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



MITCH MCCONNELL
REPUBLICAN LEADER



JOHN CORNYN
UNITED STATES SENATOR