

After Sunday's deadly bomb attack in Lahore (Pakistan): Strengthen Civilian Institutions and Reform Curriculum to Combat Terrorism

Secularism is essential for the protection and freedom of all citizens

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PRESS RELEASE

AWP: STRENGTHEN CIVILIAN INSTITUTIONS AND REFORM CURRICULUM TO COMBAT TERRORISM

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ISLAMABAD: The Awami Workers Party (AWP) has called on the government to end its knee-jerk policy of reacting to terrorist violence in Pakistan by handing over additional discretionary powers to the military and security agencies and demanded that the government begin to eliminate the structural causes of extremism and terror in the country. In particular, the AWP called for the strengthening of civilian institutions like police and courts to better combat terror, nationalization of madrassas that produce extremists, a complete overhaul of the bigoted curriculum being taught in schools around the country, a cessation of the use of militant proxies against other states, a repeal of discriminatory laws against minorities, an end to the proliferation of hate speech in all its forms and a firm commitment to secularism and religious equality.

The AWP made the call while reiterating its condemnation of Sunday's deadly bomb attack in Lahore's Gulshan-e-Iqbal Park which killed over 70 people including many children and targeted Christians celebrating Easter. The party said that the unabated terrorist attacks, despite over a year having passed since the 'National Action Plan' was enacted and countless military operations conducted in FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa show that a military solution alone cannot resolve the problem.

"After every abhorrent terrorist attack, the state responds by curbing more rights for citizens and giving more powers to the military and security agencies," said Nusrat Hussain, general secretary of AWP's Islamabad/Rawalpindi chapter. "How much more will we concede before we realize that this kind of response only exacerbates the social problems that enable terrorist violence and social discord?"

Hussain listed a number of changes introduced by the government in recent years in the name of security, including: military courts for civilians; increased restrictions on the media and expression of citizens; expanded powers for law enforcement agencies to arrest without a warrant and immunity for abuses by security forces; increased powers for security agencies to monitor the private communication of citizens; and an expansion of the role of the military in law enforcement and civil policing. "Despite all of these rights being taken away from civilians in the name of security, our security are still unable to stop mass terrorist attacks from taking place all over the

country and in the heart of our biggest cities.” said Hussain. “On the contrary, we have seen these draconian laws and increased powers for security forces being used to crack down on legitimate political and community activists rather than terrorist organisations. Instead of this, the civilian state apparatus needed to be strengthened and better resourced to combat terrorism under democratic oversight.”

AWP Islamabad/Rawalpindi President Masud ul Hasan said that the government needed to demonstrate seriousness in resolving the root social, political and economic causes of terror. He said that madrassas producing extremists of all hues needed to be nationalized and their curriculum regulated to ensure the cancer of fundamentalism is stopped. He said that even in government schools, children were being taught to hate minorities and believe in religious supremacism, which needed widespread reform to teach the values of justice, peace and tolerance. He further said that the vast wealth inequality resulting from the neo-liberal economic policies of successive civilian and military governments, along with the culture of religious and ethnic hate speech promoted from our pulpits and legal frameworks yet remain unaddressed by the state.

This was demonstrated on Sunday, when on the same day that a bomb blast had targeted Christians in Lahore, in Islamabad thousands of people associated with Islamic religious organizations were occupying Islamabad’s Red Zone – in full view of state authorities — to protest against the execution of Mumtaz Qadri, the man who assassinated former Punjab Governor Salmaan Taseer and call for the execution of Aasia bibi a poor Christian woman in prison on charges of blasphemy. The protestors are also calling for legal protection for vigilantes who murder alleged blasphemers.

“In this alarming situation, the Awami Workers Party believes that only a firm commitment to secularism, in which the laws and functions of the state are separated from religion, is essential for the protection and freedom of all citizens, especially of religious minorities,” said Nusrat Hussain.

Awami Workers Party (AWP)
