

In Pakistan, Courts Should Protect Non-Muslims Rather Than Promote Discrimination

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ISLAMABAD: The Awami Workers Party (AWP) is deeply concerned by a recent order issued by the Islamabad High Court (IHC) requiring all citizens to declare their religion under oath as a pre-condition to be appointed to any government job. While giving due respect to the court, AWP said the decision sets a dangerous precedent that could further fuel the existing institutional discrimination towards religious minorities in Pakistan.

The order was issued on Friday as part of the Islamabad High Court's verdict on a petition concerning amendments to the Elections Act 2017. The order stated that a sworn affidavit of a citizen's religion should be a requirement for appointment in all government and semi-government institutions, especially for the judiciary, armed forces, and civil services.

The judgement also ordered a similar sworn affidavit to also be required for any citizen applying for a national identity card, passport, birth certificate or entry into any voters list. It also ordered the government of Pakistan to take measures to prevent citizen's from hiding their "real" faith.

The judgement openly regards non-Muslims as a threat to the Pakistani state and seeks to prevent them from gaining access to "dignified and sensitive posts resulting in accumulation of all benefits".

In a statement, the Awami Workers Party expressed fear that the judgement could be in violation of the fundamental right to enter any lawful profession, thus making non-Muslims second-class citizens in their own country. It should be pointed out that while the IHC judgement on multiple occasions refers to "constitutional offices", including in the judiciary and armed forces, to which non-Muslims should be denied appointment, according to the Constitution of Pakistan only the office of President is denied to non-Muslims. Indeed, one of Pakistan's most influential judges, Justice Cornelius, was a Christian and served as the Chief Justice of Pakistan from 1960 to 1968.

AWP also expressed concern that the requirement for non-Muslims to be easily identifiable does not take into account the fact that the reason why some non-Muslims choose to hide their faith is due to the fear of persecution and violence on the basis of their religion. The recent case of the brutal custodial torture and sexual abuse of Christians Patras and Sajid Masih in Lahore is one such incident in a long line of harrowing cases of violence against non-Muslims in Pakistan. Instead of trying to end this systematic persecution of non-Muslims, the IHC judgement is likely to make them even more vulnerable to mob violence.

AWP is also concerned that such discriminatory laws and judgements that are already in place continue to be used as a convenient weapon in disputes that are altogether unrelated to religion, in which the victims overwhelmingly belong to the working class.

Ultimately, the Awami Workers Party believes that the only way to truly protect citizens' right to freely practice their religion – for both Muslims and non-Muslims – is for the state to be separate

from religion. AWP believes in the equality of all human beings, and especially rejects the exploitation of religion by the ruling classes to accumulate wealth for themselves at the expense of the mass of Muslim and non-Muslim working class Pakistanis.

Awami Workers Party (AWP)

P.S.

* AWAMI WORKERS' PARTY (OFFICIAL)· 14 MACH 2018:

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