

August 31, 2012

His Excellency Mian Gul Akbar Zeb
High Commissioner of Pakistan to Canada
10 Range Road
Ottawa ON K1N 8J3

Your Excellency,

We wish to express our concern regarding the recent incarceration of a young girl with Down's syndrome who is suspected of desecrating the Qur'an. The girl, who is from a Christian family, risks being sentenced to life imprisonment.

This serious situation has prompted the President of Pakistan, His Excellency Mr. Asif Ali Zardari, to call for an investigation. We welcome this gesture, given the circumstances not only of the girl herself but also of Pakistan's religious minorities, including Christians, who are regularly the target of fundamentalist groups, in particular regarding anti-blasphemy laws.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the adoption by all States in 1992 of the United Nations *Declaration on the Rights of Persons from National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities*.

In view of this Declaration and the initiative of the President of Pakistan, we ask your government to take the necessary measures to find a solution that ensures this girl's freedom, peace and security. These measures would be a testimony to the encounter of our two religious traditions and their Holy Books in their appeal to God's mercy.

Thank you for your consideration to our request.

Sincerely,

The Most Reverend François Lapierre, P.M.É

Bishop of Saint-Hyacinthe

Chairman of the Human Rights Committee

Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops

c.c.: The Honourable John Baird, Minister of Foreign Affairs

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