

Intervention

Afsheen Naz, Pakistan

**Agenda Item # 04 Practical Use of Declaration: Identification of Good Practices and Positive Measures** Thank you Madam Chair,

I am Afsheen Naz, working with Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI), a national NGO in Islamabad, Pakistan

According to-the-Article 22 (1) of the constitution of Pakistan 1973 "No person attending any educational institution shall be required to receive religious instruction, or take part in any -religious ceremony, or attend religious worship, if such instruction, ceremony or worship relates - to a religion other than his own"

Incidents of discrimination against religious minorities are increasing in the country, and are sometimes very intense in nature. The attitudes of the larger society are not sensitised in dealing with the religious diversity in the country and as a result these minority communities have had to adapt to cope in this hostile environment. For instance, in the Christian community in Pakistan there has been a planned strategy of adopting Muslim names to evade discrimination.

In a recent study of SPDI<sup>1</sup>, contents of textbooks in public schools from grade 1-10 of all of the four provinces have been found to include examples of bias against religious minorities. For example, contents of certain textbooks explicitly describe Hindus as narrow minded. In fact, information recognizing other religions in Pakistanis completely absent from the textbooks. The study concluded that the biased content and the absence of cross-religion information not only support the discriminatory attitudes of the majority towards minorities but also increases the sense of social exclusion in the minority community.

The education system plays an important role in shaping the attitudes towards a more pluralistic society.

The government of Pakistan has made a commendable move by devolving the ministry of education from the federal to provincial level under the 18<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendment, bringing reform in educational curriculum, syllabus, planning, policy, centers of excellence and standards of education under the responsibility of the provinces.<sup>2</sup> However, since all the provincial textbooks demonstrate

prejudice against people of other religions, there is a need to revise the curricula by incorporating minority sensitive intercultural education, as enshrined in the UN Declaration on Minorities.

Specifically, measures need to be taken to ensure inclusion of positive materials relating to minority religions and their followers as well and all of the provinces should ensure the presence and substantial involvement of the minority representatives in the process of revising curricula.

Therefore, we recommend the adoption of Draft Recommendation No. 33, in particular, the second part which emphasizes plurality and countering negative stereotypes. These are most important for the situation of religious minorities of Pakistan. In this context, the role of the education system should aim to bring religious tolerance to the country. -51141/4401

Thank you for your attention

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