



Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office

Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon
Minister of State for South and
Central Asia, North Africa, UN and
the Commonwealth
Prime Minister's Special
Representative on Preventing Sexual
Violence in Conflict

King Charles Street
London
SW1A 2AH
Tel: 0207 008 5000

Email:
fcdo.correspondence@fcdo.gov.uk

www.gov.uk/fcdo

Our ref: MC2022/07625

11 April 2022

Iain Stewart MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Dear Iain,

Thank you for your correspondence of 9 March on behalf of a number of your constituents about the plight of Pakistani Hindus, especially girls, in Pakistan. I am replying as the Minister of State for South Asia and Minister responsible for human rights.

The UK strongly condemns forced marriage and the forced conversion of women and girls. In November, I spoke at the launch event for the All Party Parliamentary Group for Pakistani Minorities' report, 'Abductions, Forced Conversions, and Forced Marriages of Religious Minority Women and Girls in Pakistan', important research which puts the spotlight on this brutal practice. My speech underlined the UK's commitment to promoting freedom, choice and education for women and girls in Pakistan, as well as the UK's disappointment that draft legislation that would have criminalised forced conversions stalled in Pakistan's Parliament last year.

We regularly raise our concerns about Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB), women and girl's rights and gender equality at a senior level with the Government of Pakistan. During my visit to Pakistan on 23 and 24 June, I met then-Prime Minister Imran Khan, as well as other senior Pakistani government ministers in power at the time, including then-Foreign Minister Qureshi, and then-Human Rights Minister Mazari. During these meetings, I highlighted the need to address persecution, promote respect for all religions and increase tolerance for religious minorities. I also met interfaith leaders to understand the situation of minorities in Pakistan, particularly the issues of forced conversion and marriages of young girls. Most recently, I discussed the need to promote respect for all religions with Governor of Punjab Chaudhry Mohammad Sarwar on 28 November, and on January 6 with Shaikh Hasan Haseeb Ur Rehman of the Council of Islamic Ideology, and Pir Naqeeb, custodian of the Eidgah Sharif Shrine in Rawalpindi.

In Pakistan, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) provides funding to programmes that directly address human rights concerns, especially early and forced marriages, gender-based violence and modern slavery. Our Aawaz II Accountability, Inclusion and Reducing Modern Slavery Programme operates in the

Pakistani provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab. This programme focuses on the issues of child labour, child and forced marriages, gender-based violence, and discrimination and intolerance, especially against minorities and other socially excluded groups. The programme works directly with communities to raise their awareness of the harms of early and forced marriages. It also supports policy dialogue and enactment of new legislation by the Government of Pakistan.

The FCDO's Open Societies programme complements this work. The programme supports the Government of Pakistan's efforts to strengthen their legislation and improve police and judicial responses to victims. The UK has also supported the Government of Pakistan in setting up eight child courts across the country to provide child-sensitive justice to children who come into contact with the law, including victims of child abuse, trafficking and child marriage.

We will continue to urge the Government of Pakistan to guarantee the rights of all people in Pakistan, particularly the most vulnerable, as laid down in the constitution of Pakistan and in accordance with international standards.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Tariq Ahmad of Wimbledon". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

LORD (TARIQ) AHMAD OF WIMBLEDON

Minister of State for South and Central Asia, North Africa, UN and the Commonwealth
Prime Minister's Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict