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Title: Statement regarding issue of persecution of Hindus in some parts of Pakistan.

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI S.M. KRISHNA): Hon. Madam Speaker, I rise to inform this august House that Government has from time to time come across reports on the problems faced by members of the minority communities in Pakistan. Incidents of persecution and intimidation of the minority communities have also been reported. Recently, in separate incidents, three hindu girls in Sindh province have reportedly been abducted and married against their will to Muslim men after being forcefully converted to Islam. This issue is a matter of concern to the Government and is being taken up appropriately with the Government of Pakistan.

In the past, we have also seen of reports of kidnapping and killing of members of the minority communities and desecration/encroachment of their places of religious worship in Pakistan. It is the responsibility of the Government of Pakistan to discharge its constitutional obligations towards its citizens, including those from the minority community.

While, the Simla Agreement of 1972 between India and Pakistan specifically provides for non-interference in each other's internal affairs, nevertheless, based on reports of persecution of minority groups in Pakistan, Government has taken up the matter with the Government of Pakistan in the past. The Government of Pakistan stated that it was fully cognizant of the situation and looked after the welfare of its citizens, particularly the minority community.

I also wish to inform this House that according to a Government of Pakistan Press Release, President of Pakistan has taken serious note of the reports of the kidnapping of a Hindu girl from Mirpur Mathelo District Ghotki in Sindh and allegedly being forced by some influential people of the area to convert; and called for a report from the provincial government. The President also called for transparent and expeditious investigations in the matter and to take action in accordance with the law regardless of the influence and status of anyone involved in criminal activity. Several Members of Parliament, NGOs and civil society in Pakistan have also expressed grave concern on the incidents and called for implementation of laws to protect the rights of the minorities in that country.

Madam Speaker, In November 2011, on the killing of three Hindu doctors in Sindh, the President of Pakistan had called for a report on the incident and directed immediate arrest of the people responsible for the killings. He had also said that it was the moral and legal responsibility of the Government to protect members of minority community against vandalism and atrocities. In August 2011, while speaking on the occasion of the 'Minorities' Day' in Pakistan, Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani said, I quote: "Unfortunately some extremist elements with a view to advancing their own narrow and bigoted agendas have targeted the minorities. The Government, however, stands fully committed to foil the designs of these extremist elements. The perpetrators of the crime against the minority community anywhere in Pakistan - must be brought to justice and they will be".

While it is our hope that the Government of Pakistan will discharge its constitutional duties towards its minority communities, in view of the purely humanitarian nature of this issue, we appeal to the people and Government of Pakistan to take all possible steps to protect the constitutional rights of their minorities by ensuring their safety, security and well being.

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