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Romlah Narithiwat from southern Thailand, center, participates in an International Women's Day activity during the School of Peace (SOP) in 2010 in Bangalore, India.

Celebrating the Unsung Heroes on International Women's Day

Rachel Bergen

Celebrating the lives and contributions of women began in the United States when the Socialist Party of America organized the first National Women's Day on Feb. 28 in 1909 to recognize the women who took part in a garment workers' strike in New York City the

previous year for better working conditions. This initiative was expanded by the Socialist International during their meeting in 1910 in Copenhagen to promote the rights of women, including the right to vote, with the first International Women's Day being observed on March 19 in several European countries in 1911. In 1913 and 1914, the day was an occasion to protest against World War I and push for peace. The current International Women's Day of March 8 began to be observed by the United Nations in 1975.

In this article, the lives and work of four women from different faiths and different Asian countries who have attended the School of Peace (SOP) conducted by Interfaith Cooperation Forum (ICF) are celebrated. [\[Read more\]](#)

Reconciliation Is a Journey

Miriam Sainnawap

Beginning in the 19th century, Indian residential schools (IRS) were established across Canada for children of the native population. Funded by the government and operated by churches, more than 150,000 First Nations, Métis and Inuit children were forced for more than a



century to attend these schools against the wishes of their parents. Through the current activities of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada, an attempt is now being made to learn what happened in these schools as part of a process to heal these experiences of the past.

The author, a First Nations woman who attended the School of Peace (SOP) conducted by Interfaith Cooperation Forum (ICF) in 2012 in India, shares her participation in this ongoing process in Canada. [\[Read more\]](#)

‘Our Work Is Not to Make Music or Videos, but to Make Change’

Saw Mort

Born in a refugee camp on the Thai-Burma border, Saw Doo Plot Soe, or Kipho, who attended the School of Peace (SOP) in 2010, crossed the border into his homeland to share with organizations in Burma how to harness the power of videos to move people to think and take action for social change.

[\[Read more\]](#)



Reforms Gathering Momentum but Road Ahead Paved with Same Challenges

Burma Partnership

As people inside and outside of Burma look forward to the country's first civilian government in more than half a century taking office, democracy's old nemesis in the country remains—the military. [\[Read more\]](#)



From Banana Republics to Beef Murders

Avinash Pandey

More violence against religious minorities has transpired in India, involving this time a mob lynching two Muslims from a tree. Not only are the mobs complicit in these murders, according to the author, but so are government officials, law enforcement officers and even civil society. He offers a prescription, however, for India's epidemic of communal violence: reinvigorating and strengthening India's legal system to respond to violence and illegal acts with justice. [\[Read more\]](#)



Ahmadis Target of Religious Expediency Once Again in Pakistan

Asian Human Rights Commission

Like its South Asian neighbor and rival India, religious minorities in Pakistan face ongoing and relentless persecution. In the most recent case, the murder of Qamar Ul Zia, an Ahmadi, was in retaliation for the execution Mumtaz Qadri, the bodyguard of the provincial governor of Punjab, Salmaan Taseer, who killed the governor in 2011 because he spoke out against Pakistan's blasphemy laws. [\[Read more\]](#)



Celebrating the Unsung Heroes on International Women's Day

Rachel Bergen

Women are unacknowledged heroes in the world. They are peacemakers, providers, self-sacrificing and strong in the face of incredible adversity.

March 8—[International Women's Day](#)— marks an opportunity to recognize all that women do to contribute to their communities despite a lack of parity with males. It's a global day of celebrating the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women. The day also marks a call to action for accelerating gender parity. This day has been celebrated for more than 100 years, and no one government, non-governmental organization (NGO), charity, corporation, academic institution, women's network or media hub is solely responsible for International Women's Day.

Interfaith Cooperation Forum (ICF) has the privilege of working with amazing women from all over the world. We have seen them learn and grow through the School of Peace (SOP) to become agents of change in their communities. These women work tirelessly to promote justpeace and improve the quality of life in their communities. The women below are just a few of the women ICF has the privilege of working with.

Romlah Narithiwat

Romlah is a graduate of SOP 2010 and is from Pattani Province in southern Thailand. She worked for years supporting villagers who have seen husbands, sons and brothers sent to prison on suspicion of anti-state activity. Now her husband, Anwar Hajiteh, is facing the same fate. Romlah visits him regularly, campaigns for his release from prison and supports her own family as well as Anwar's.

"I will keep fighting to free Anwar," Romlah says. "If I am successful in bringing him home, other cases will have hope too."

Elizarni

Elizarni, from Aceh in Indonesia, attended the first SOP in Bangalore, India, in 2006. She is currently working on her Ph.D. at Ohio University in the United States studying alternative education. During her graduate studies, she used her SOP experience as an example of alternative education. Elizarni hopes to return to Aceh to work on developing a better education system in her home community.



Suborna Poli Drong, right, leads the discussion during a workshop in Bangladesh.

Suborna Poli Drong

Poli is a Christian woman from Bangladesh who graduated from SOP in 2012. She works for a non-profit organization called Shanti Mitra and is a member of the ICF program committee. Poli has organized the Bangladesh Festival of Justpeace for the past three years and plays a significant role in spreading the message of justpeace in the region.

Suwarti Ningsih

Ningsih, a SOP alumni from 2010, grew up in Poso in the Indonesian province of Central Sulawesi during a conflict between Christians and Muslims. Ningsih works with an alternative women's school in which she visits different communities teaching about economic development. She also helps raise funds for the school.

Ningsih currently serves as the ICF national coordinator in Indonesia.

Laxmi Pathak

Laxmi, a Hindu woman from Nepal, graduated from SOP in 2008. She currently works with a broad range of people, including child laborers, Dalits and people with disabilities. These projects are holistic and involve child protection and participation, inclusive education, microfinance and improved livelihoods, health support and advocacy for policy implementation or policy change.

ICF is struck by the work ethic of these four women and their commitment to building peaceful communities rooted in justice.

"None of these women ever seem to run out of energy," ICF coordinator Max Ediger says. "They're very committed to their work for justpeace."

We encourage our network to celebrate the contributions of women but also to stand up and call for gender parity.

Rachel Bergen is an intern from Canada working for Interfaith Cooperation Forum (ICF) in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Her one-year internship is supported by the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC).

Reconciliation Is a Journey

Miriam Sainnawap

[The Truth and Reconciliation Commission \(TRC\) of Canada](#) explains its mandate and work in this way:

“Residential schools for Aboriginal people in Canada date back to the 1870s. More than 130 residential schools were located across the country, and the last school closed in 1996. These government-funded, church-run schools were set up to eliminate parental involvement in the intellectual, cultural and spiritual development of Aboriginal children.

“During this era, more than 150,000 First Nations, Métis and Inuit children were placed in these schools, often against their parents’ wishes. Many were forbidden to speak their language and practice their own culture. While there is an estimated 80,000 former students living today, the ongoing impact of residential schools has been felt throughout generations and has contributed to social problems that continue to exist.

“The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada has a mandate to learn the truth about what happened in the residential schools and to inform all Canadians about what happened in the schools. The commission will document the truth of what happened by relying on records held by those who operated and funded the schools, testimony from officials of the institutions that operated the schools and experiences reported by survivors, their families, communities and anyone personally affected by the residential school experience and its subsequent impacts.

“The commission hopes to guide and inspire First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples and Canadians in a process of truth and healing, leading toward reconciliation and renewed relationships based on mutual understanding and respect.

“The commission views reconciliation as an ongoing individual and collective process that will require participation from all those affected by the residential school experience. This includes First Nations, Inuit and Métis former students, their families, communities, religious groups, former Indian residential school employees, the government and the people of Canada.”



A class in penmanship at the Red Deer Indian Industrial School in Red Deer, Alberta, circa 1914 or 1919, from the United Church of Canada (UCC) archives. (Photo from <http://wherearethekids.ca>)

Honestly, when I was a participant at the School of Peace (SOP) in 2012, the word *reconciliation* wasn't in my vocabulary. I lived my life to this day, thinking how I can show kindness, respect and love to others.

In my experience at SOP, I learned the value of acceptance of the other person's values, beliefs and worship, thinking how easy for me to have judged and rejected people because they are different from me. It gave me a gift of understanding with an open heart and open mind.

In early March, I was invited to an event in Canada called the National Reconciliation Gathering in Winnipeg, Manitoba, hosted by Reconciliation Canada. The organization is

travelling across Canada and is bringing reconciliation to the forefront of Canadian consciousness.

I wasn't sure what to expect and how the day would unfold. When I arrived, there were friendly smiles greeting me though. They assured me and handed me a package of information. I needed to follow directions about where to sit at table No. 15 as shown on my name tag. I looked around the room and saw familiar faces.

The gathering started with a local elder blessing the day and giving thanks to offer words of encouragement. Many people were present from different sectors of society, ranging from politicians, educators, pastors, students and business people. Speakers from a multicultural survivors panel shared their experiences and perspectives of history on genocide, oppression and how survival turned into hope and freedom.

The emcees for the day were Waneek Horn-Miller, a Mohawk, a former Olympian and a motivational speaker, and Jessica Bolduc, an Anishinaabe, who is the founder of the 4Rs Youth Movement.

Indigenous peoples and all Canadians are experiencing an awakening in Canadian history. The TRC of Canada completed and documented their historic work to create an account of government-funded, church-led Indian residential schools (IRS). These schools date back to the 1870s driven by a policy of forced assimilation "to kill the Indian in the child." Many call the residential school system a "cultural genocide" of indigenous peoples. The commission released [94 calls to action](#) urging indigenous peoples and all Canadians to recognize the importance of building relationships based on respect, recognition and reciprocity. Their message is clear in the words of Justice Murray Sinclair, one of the commissioners on the TRC: "Reconciliation is not an aboriginal problem; it is a Canadian problem. It involves all of us."

The topic of reconciliation in Canada is a nationwide call to action. [Reconciliation Canada](#) is an indigenous-led movement based on the following three concepts as foundational to reconciliation: optimum potential, shared prosperity and social and systematic change.

These concepts are essential to promoting reconciliation and strengthening relationships and creating healthy communities among indigenous peoples and all Canadians. They are important in building on a foundation of openness, respect, understanding and hope.

During our gathering, participants were seated at small tables—an important component of the gathering. We were given specific instructions to first introduce each other, process and answer the following questions: what is my name/traditional name, where is my ancestral homeland and what is my cultural identity? One person would share from their heart, and the rest of us would listen to understand our diverse histories and experiences. Next we were paired with a partner, and we took turns asking specific questions on reconciliation: What does reconciliation mean to me? Why is reconciliation meaningful to me? Lastly, as a group, we shared our thoughts, perceptions and challenges on reconciliation where one person in the group wrote them down on a sheet of paper. This exercise was to motivate us and encourage us to develop a plan of action in reconciliation and make a commitment to reconciliation. There were no right or wrong answers to these questions.

The day ended in a closing prayer, and I was gifted a medicine pouch to remind me of my journey of reconciliation. My words are reconciliation is a process. Reconciliation is a journey. Reconciliation is recognition, respect and reciprocity. Reconciliation is messy. Reconciliation should become part of you and your life.

Miriam Sainnawap is a Cree-Ojibway woman from Winnipeg, Manitoba, in Canada and is a School of Peace (SOP) 2012 alumna.



Saw Doo Plot Soe, or Kipho, center, shares his insights and skills about producing videos for creating change at a journalism training program he organized in Burma for members of Karen organizations. (Photo by Saw Mort)

‘Our Work Is Not to Make Music or Videos, but to Make Change’

Saw Mort

Saw Doo Plot Soe, or Kipho as his friends know him, is a young active man who gave a video journalism training course in March in Karen State in Burma with his purpose for the training being to make change.

“Our work is not to make music or videos,” he always says, “but to make change.”

In the training, 13 participants from several Karen community-based organizations, such as the Karen Student Network Group (KSNG), Karen Women Organization (KWO), etc., joined the course.

In the video training program before the session began, he presented some issues to the participants and initiated discussion about them. He shared what he learned about dialogue from the School of Peace (SOP) in 2010 that Interfaith Cooperation Forum (ICF) held in India. He tried to clarify the meaning of discussion, debate, dialogue and engagement. After this introduction, he began to teach the participants techniques about taking videos.

As just noted, the training brought back memories about what he learned from SOP and other ICF workshops. Now he began to let people start to think and to do action.

“Our role,” he emphasized to the participants, “is to tell the story to make people think and take action.”

In his training, he used only the Sgaw Karen language, but sometimes it was hard for him and others to understand because the technical words used in videography do not exist in the Karen language, so he tried to develop a new vocabulary with the participants. The new Karen terms about video starts from us, Kipho said, and later people will use them. The Karen identity is very important to him.

After one week of the video journalism training program, the participants gained knowledge and skills. The products of the participants’ work was shared on Kwe Ka Lu, a Karen-language media web site.

“Start working to fulfill your dreams,” Kipho told the participants. “Otherwise, someone will put you to work to fulfill their dreams.”

Saw Mort, a 2007 SOP alumnus, is a member of the Karen Student Network Group (KSNG).



U Htin Kyaw, left, chosen by Aung San Suu Kyi to be the president of the new government and Burma's first civilian president since 1962, will most likely find that the old obstacles to democratization—the military's defense of its political power—have not faded away because of elections. *(Photo from <http://am1590theanswer.com>)*

Reforms Gathering Momentum but Road Ahead Paved with Same Challenges

Burma Partnership

Ahead of the formal transfer of power on April 1, 2016, the buzz around Burma centered on the recent [nominations](#) for cabinet ministerial positions and how the new National League for Democracy (NLD)-led government will take shape. In addition, many people also welcomed the recent early raft of reforms that are gaining in momentum and scale. Apart from a proposal to [abolish](#) a “guest registration system” long used for harassment and surveillance of activists, Burma's president-elect, U Htin Kyaw, also put forward

nominees to lead the soon-to-be revamped [Union Elections Commission](#) and [Constitutional Tribunal](#)—two crucial democratic institutions that have come under severe criticism for questions over their impartiality and independence during the term of the Thein Sein government. This slight democratic opening is a significant watershed in the country's turbulent history of direct and indirect military rule and seems to have also galvanized citizens and civil society organizations into action inside the country.

In response to the emerging challenges in the natural resources and extractive industries, a network of local organizations, including the Rays of Kamoethway Indigenous People and Nature (RKIPN) and Tenasserim River Indigenous People Network (TRIP-NET), [launched](#) a [report](#) on March 24 that showcased an alternative model where local communities take the lead on conservation of the local environment as well as implement projects based on the needs and contexts of the development priorities that they themselves decide, including preserving and applying indigenous culture. Similarly, Kachin civil society groups from the Myanmar Alliance for Transparency and Accountability [requested](#) that U.S. sanctions not to be lifted until measurable and actionable steps, such as strengthening the legal framework for the jade industry, have been adopted and the recent failures which have led to high death tolls and a mining waste crisis are tackled.

Certainly, the ability to take part in affairs and processes that impact their lives by exerting influence through public debate, dialogue or their capacity to organize themselves is an important marker of democratic space enjoyed by ordinary citizens and communities.

However, a great deal of uncertainty and a number of pressing human rights concerns remain. Representatives from a national civil society coalition, the Burma/Myanmar UPR Forum, co-chaired by Burma Partnership, held a [press conference](#) in Rangoon to brief the public and media about the extremely [disappointing](#) showing by the outgoing government at the recently concluded adoption of the U.N. universal periodic review (UPR) outcome report in Geneva, including the categorical rejection of all recommendations relating to the recognition and rights of the Rohingya and others involving ethnic and religious minorities as well as those concerning the treatment and release of [political prisoners](#), the repeal of repressive legislation and the endemic land

confiscation that grips the country, among others. Even as it prepares to vacate office, the government led by the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) continues to make a mockery of (or pay lip service to, at best) international standards, processes and obligations.

In addition, despite the plaudits and accolades for a “nationwide ceasefire agreement” (NCA), the entrenched [impunity](#) of the military continues as human rights abuses, such as forced labor, torture, rape and sexual violence, threaten the lives of villagers, particularly in ethnic areas where armed conflict and militarization has intensified. The recent [targeting](#) of Ta’ang civilian populations has led to over another 1,000 people displaced from villages, creating further problems for the incoming leadership.

Definitely, many of the fundamental freedoms and rights above, which are necessary for and underpin any robust functioning democracy, have been systematically restricted and denied in the country. Recently, there also appeared to be significant pushbacks against calls for reform, change and accountability as the NLD prepares to formally take power. On March 27, Armed Forces Day, the Burma army’s commander in chief, Min Aung Hlaing, [warned](#) against “disorderly democracy” in the country where there are “weakness[es] in obeying rules, regulations and laws and having armed insurgents.” Such fear-mongering slogans are, in fact, a thinly veiled threat and a clear sign that the military will not retreat from national politics any time soon and that the institution will continue to assume a leading role. It could also well signify that democracy and rights activism will not be tolerated and that a more enlightened and inclusive approach is unlikely to be adopted in trying to establish an enduring, just and genuine nationwide peace.

Min Aung Hlaing’s words should not be taken lightly as they sound eerily familiar to the “discipline-flourishing democracy” once championed by Khin Nyunt, the architect of Burma’s previous blueprint for democracy, that also envisaged permanent military participation and intervention in the administration, governance and management of the country. Doubts will certainly continue to linger on the extent, speed and character of Burma’s democratization insofar as the Burma army maintains its intransigence and is protected by constitutional safeguards.

Whatever form Burma’s democratization takes, the incoming government will definitely have to “tread on eggshells” as it navigates the complex road ahead with other political

actors, including those who have grown accustomed to enjoying privileges and abusing power, as well as meeting the aspirations and needs of the people. However, as evidenced above, Burma also has a dynamic and vibrant rights-based independent civil society whose role as agents of democratization should not be neglected and whose tireless work in the areas of promoting democratic governance, advocating for human rights and political equality, as well as for the establishment for a genuine federal union, will be central in the reforms and transition process.

Burma Partnership is a network of organizations throughout the Asia-Pacific region that advocate and work toward realizing a movement for democracy and human rights in Burma. Based in Thailand, it acts as a link between groups inside the country and solidarity organizations around the world.

From Banana Republics to Beef Murders

Avinash Pandey

“A mob is the scum that rises upmost when the nation boils.” —John Dryden, English poet

The picture showing two Muslims —one of them a teenaged boy—hanging from a tree in Latehar in the state of Jharkhand is going to haunt the Republic of India for a long time. Nothing indicts the failure of a criminal justice system like a lynch mob. Whether they may seem to reflect righteous anger or not, whether they operate by design or default, lynch mobs prove that the State has lost sole control over coercive power, the cornerstone of maintaining law and order. And, in this case, the lynching was by design.

But first, let us look at some facts of the case. The victims were cattle traders. Self-designated vigilante groups, moonlighting to protect cows, which are sacred to Hindus, the religion of the majority of India’s people, apparently killed the two traders. One of the five arrested suspects, Mithilesh Prasad Sahu, is, in fact, a member of a cow protection committee, something disclosed by the Latehar police chief, Anoop Bitharay. It must be noted that these vigilantes are nothing new to the countryside. It is just that they were never this murderous before the incumbent regime came to power.

And it is here that the design enters the frame. The Latehar lynching is not the first one. The murders started in Dadri, a village in the state of Uttar Pradesh—thousands of kilometers away on the outskirts of Delhi, the national capital. A lynch mob was organized there following open calls on a public address system of a Hindu temple against a family's alleged consumption of beef.



Is India developing a new reputation? (*Illustration by Sumesh Chalissery*)

The slaughter of cows is illegal in many Indian states, including Uttar Pradesh, but not in all Indian states. However, the consumption of beef is perfectly legal in Uttar Pradesh, and, in fact, the consumption of buffalo meat is legal in all Indian states. But this meant nothing to the mob. It attacked the family and lynched its head, 50-year-old Mohammad Akhlaq.

Despite the media controversy that followed in its wake, the lynching was not going to be the last beef murder either. The scene of action soon shifted to another state—Himachal

Pradesh—where a [Muslim man was killed](#) by “villagers” over the suspicion of cow smuggling.

The next murder was reported from the nearby state of Haryana where armed vigilantes attacked a group of migrant workers based on the suspicion of the workers having smuggled cows. It is just that this time the mob arrived along with the police [as admitted by Hanif Qureshi](#), inspector general of police in Karnal. The officer further admitted that it is normal practice in Haryana for cow protection volunteers, working in coordination with the police, to nab cattle smugglers. Such close cooperation between police and beef vigilantes is not surprising in a state ruled by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the right-wing political party espousing the Hindutva ideology that is currently in power of the national government as well.

This summary only recounts the cases wherein the mobs could kill their victims, not instances where the Muslims were “merely” beaten up or even arrested, [like another recent incident in the western state of Rajasthan](#).

The killings do not augur well for the nation, which is already beleaguered by increasing violence from right-wing Hindutva forces. Worse, it does not augur well for the country’s criminal justice system, which had somehow successfully maintained the facade of being a functional legal system despite its institutional failures, making it so similar to those of so-called Banana Republics, for it has largely failed to deliver justice. And now it has begun failing to curb injustices, like beef murders being committed by murderous mobs, despite often being well informed about them.

The mobs have not come out of a vacuum, however. Conditions have been ripe for a long time as hardly has anyone in India ever been punished for their role in mob crimes, be it mobs killing people over some emotive issue in countless riots or violent mobs taking a whole state to ransom and killing and maiming people for some socio-political demand. Unlike the new-age Hindutva vigilantes, however, most of these mobs did not have specific and long-term plans.

Moreover, seldom did these mobs erupt and indulge in violence across the country in actions that range from synchronized mob lynchings to lone wolf attacks. They did not

erupt in this manner because they were not always this sure of the political protection they have now.

Once the lynch mob takes over, it does not leave anyone alone, not even those instrumental in unleashing the mob. Today it is beef; tomorrow it may be chicken. Remember Uma Bharati, now a central government minister, doing exactly that as chief minister of Madhya Pradesh? Yes, she, indeed, [declared three cities as “holy”](#) and banned the sale of liquor and meat there.

Herein lies another sad comment on civil society’s failure to comprehend the urgent need for the re-engineering of legal and criminal justice institutions in India. Rather than embrace and espouse this need, civil society often jumps from outrage to outrage on issues, to the extent of legitimizing this outrage as a source of lawmaking, as evidenced by the passage of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Bill of 2015. Ultimately, this urge to quickly enact laws is what the righteous outrage over the infamous Dec. 16 gang rape and murder of a young student in Delhi in 2012 brought about—a decision to punish children as adults.

If outrage is the way for civil society to handle all issues, rather than constructive institutional rebuilding, what if this same method is employed by right-wing fanatics too, who only take their sense of outrage up a notch and murder those they oppose?

It is the absence of a fair and functioning justice system that creates such a sense of outrage and allows lynch mobs to run rampant and for a government moreover to support such mobs.

The writing is on the wall. The beef murders are just the beginning of a long and arduous process wherein the final pretense of India’s justice institutions will collapse.

The only way out is to transform India’s outmoded institutions.

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Qamar Ul Zia (Photo from <http://timesofahmad.blogspot.hk>)

Ahmadis Target of Religious Expediency Once Again in Pakistan

Asian Human Rights Commission

A new wave of attacks on religious minority groups has gripped the country after the execution of Mumtaz Qadri, the killer of Punjab's former governor, Salmaan Taseer, for criticizing Pakistan's blasphemy laws. Qadri was executed on Feb. 29, and countrywide protests began simultaneously.

On the day of Qadri's burial, March 1, Qamar Ul Zia, a young Ahmadi businessman, was stabbed to death outside his house in Kot Abdul Malik in Punjab's Sheikhpura District in a religiously motivated attack. He was bringing his children back home from school when

two unknown assailants pounced on him with knives in broad daylight. He received multiple wounds and died immediately. The deceased was the only breadwinner in his family and is survived by his widow, son and two daughters.

Qamar Ul Zia operated a mobile phone business from his home and faced hostility for being an Ahmadi for quite some time. In 2012, he was harassed by opponents of the Ahmadi community after which he lodged a complaint at the Factory Area Police Station in August of that year and was forced to leave his home for a short period. Instead of protecting his rights, the police, under pressure from certain religious groups, removed the inscription “Muhammad Ali”—the name of his father—from the door of his house as well as other Islamic inscriptions, like “Masha’ Allah.” He was also beaten for being an Ahmadi in 2014.

More than 400 Ahmadis have been murdered in Pakistan for their faith. The hate campaign against Ahmadis has continued unabated as anti-Ahmadi literature is freely distributed throughout the country. According to the government’s 2015 National Action Plan, established to crack down on terrorism, those responsible for inciting hatred will be dealt with accordingly, and action will be taken against newspapers and magazines contributing to the spread of hate speech. This policy does not appear to be the case when it comes to anti-Ahmadi sentiment and literature, however. The murder of Qamar Ul Zia is clear evidence of the failure of Pakistani authorities to protect innocent Ahmadis. If those who had been agitating against Qamar had been dealt with earlier, his death could have been avoided.

Backlash from Muslim political and religious groups was expected after Qadri’s execution, and the immediate target will be religious minorities, particularly the Ahmadi community, who are seen as blasphemers. Without government protection, it is likely that incidents of violence will increase as the protesters have vowed to take revenge for Qadri’s execution.

The State is obligated under Article 36 of the Constitution of Pakistan to ensure the safety and security of vulnerable religious minority groups. Moreover, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which has been ratified by Pakistan, guarantees freedom of religion, freedom of worship and freedom of opinion without interference. It also forbids any advocacy of religious hatred. Any laws or policies that

abridge freedom of religion are thus in violation of, and in contradiction to, Pakistan's international commitments.

The Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) is a regional non-governmental organization monitoring and lobbying human rights issues in Asia. The Hong Kong-based group was founded in 1984. More information is available on AHRC's web site at <<http://www.humanrights.asia>>