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PRESS RELEASE

Date: 14 May 2026

## National Deliberative Forum calls for stronger implementation of minority rights law and operationalisation of National Commission for Minorities

- Recommendations for better regulations and their implementation are made in a two-day forum organised by the project 'Inclusivity through Diversity: Promoting Minority Rights in Pakistan Project, funded by the **European Union** and implemented by the Trust for Democratic Education and Accountability (TDEA)

**ISLAMABAD, 14 May 2026:** Federal and provincial legislators from minority communities, legal experts, and civil society representatives on Thursday called upon the federal government to operationalise the National Commission for Minority Rights (NCMR) through rules and regulations that faithfully reflect the parliamentary intent behind the NCMR Act, 2025.

Legislators representing religious minorities deliberated on various aspects of the law and emphasised the need for the early operationalisation of the National Commission for Minority Rights to safeguard the rights of faith-based communities.

H.E. Raimundas Karoblis, Ambassador of the European Union (EU) to Pakistan; Mr. Kesoo Mal Kheal Das, Minister of State for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony; Mr. Anthony Naveed, Deputy Speaker Sindh Assembly, Mr. Ramesh Singh Arora, Provincial Minister for Minorities Affairs in Punjab, Dr. Sham Sundar, Special Assistant to the CM, Sindh, for Minority Affairs, and Shahid Fiaz, the Executive Director of Trust for Democratic Education and Accountability (TDEA) addressed the closing ceremony of the two-day National Deliberative Forum on Minority Rights. The forum was organised under the project "Inclusivity through Diversity: Promoting Minority Rights in Pakistan," funded by the European Union (EU) and implemented by the TDEA, in collaboration with six co-applicants: Sangat Development Foundation, Sudhaar Society, Samaj Development Foundation (SDF), Baahn Bel (BB), PAIMAN Alumni Trust, and Goth Seengar Foundation (GSF).

The forum, titled "Strengthening the National Commission for Minorities: From Enactment to Effective Implementation," examined how the NCMR Act can be translated from legislation into meaningful outcomes that reflect Parliament's original intent. It brought together more than 22 federal and provincial minority legislators, along with civil society representatives, to document the legislative history of the Act, assess its strengths and areas of concern, define a shared framework for drafting subordinate legislation, and deliberate on the formation of a cross-parliamentary minority caucus.

Addressing the forum, H.E. Raimundas Karoblis, Ambassador of the EU to Pakistan, stated that the EU-Pakistan Strategic Engagement Plan reflects a shared commitment to promoting tolerance, harmony, and interfaith understanding. He further highlighted that "the enactment of the National Commission for Minorities Rights Act has brought hope, and we expect that it will be accompanied by robust implementation, adequate resources, representative leadership, and the necessary institutional autonomy."

Minister of State for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony, Mr. Kesoo Mal Kheal Das, thanked TDEA for providing an opportunity for non-Muslim legislators from across Pakistan to come together and discuss



measures to address the challenges faced by religious minorities. He stated that the incumbent government has announced an interfaith harmony policy and is working towards establishing the minorities commission within the next two months.

Addressing the closing ceremony, Anthony Naveed, Deputy Speaker of the Sindh Assembly, stated that the forum had united legislators belonging to religious minorities on a common platform. He noted that participants shared the concerns of faith-based communities in a structured and constructive manner, calling the initiative a significant and positive step forward. He expressed hope that such engagement among stakeholders would continue in the future.

He also appreciated the proposal to establish an inter-parliamentary caucus, which, he said, could play an important role in addressing minority issues, strengthening constitutional supremacy, and promoting provincial autonomy within the federal framework. He observed that discussions often focus on the pre-legislative stage, while post-legislative review receives little attention. He stressed the importance of evaluating the impact of legislation after enactment and assessing whether it has produced meaningful outcomes.

Dr. Sham Sundar, in his address, emphasized the need for seamless coordination among all stakeholders to ensure full protection of minority rights given under the Constitution of Pakistan. He expressed his confidence that the recommendations of the legislators will strengthen minority rights in Pakistan.

Addressing the gathering, Sardar Ramesh Singh Arora, Provincial Minister for Minorities Affairs in Punjab, appreciated TDEA's efforts in providing opportunities for legislators from religious minorities to engage in meaningful dialogue with stakeholders for the collective protection of minority rights in Pakistan. He stated that the Government of Punjab would consider the recommendations emerging from the forum and give them due importance.

He further stated that minority rights remain a core priority of the provincial government. He shared that the Punjab government is also committed to establishing a provincial caucus on minority rights. However, he noted that the key challenge would remain the effective implementation of recommendations and their translation into concrete actions.

The forum presented a detailed review of the NCMR Act, acknowledging it as a landmark legislative achievement while identifying several structural concerns that, if left unaddressed in the rules, could undermine the protections Parliament intended the Commission to guarantee. Participants called for the rules to be grounded in the full range of constitutional rights available to all citizens, including minorities, not as an addition to the Act but as a reflection of its original intent.

Additional recommendations focused on ensuring the Commission's operational and financial autonomy and called for a consultative and inclusive rule-drafting process that meaningfully engages minority communities and their elected representatives. Participants stressed that the finalised rules should carry the same democratic legitimacy as the Act itself.

Members of the National Assembly, including Mr. Kesoo Mal Kheal Das, State Minister for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony; Mr. Nelson Azeem; Mr. Naveed Aamir; Mr. Sanjay Perwani; Mr. James Iqbal; Mr. Ramesh Kumar Vankvani; and Dr. Mahesh Kumar Malani, attended the forum. Mr. Anthony Naveed, Deputy Speaker of

the Sindh Assembly; Dr. Sham Sunder; Mr. Mahesh Kumar Hasija; Mr. Aneel Kumar; and Ms. Roma Sabaht Matto, Parliamentary Secretary for Minority Affairs, Sindh, represented the Sindh Assembly. From Balochistan, Mr. Sanjay Kumar, Parliamentary Secretary for Minorities Affairs; Mr. Ashok Kumar; and Mr. Ravi Pahuja participated in the deliberations. From Punjab, Mr. Ramesh Singh Arora, Minister for Minorities Affairs, Government of Punjab; Mr. Basro Jee; Mr. Tariq Masih Gill; and from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Mr. Suresh Kumar, Mr. Beari Lal, and Mr. Asker Pervaiz attended the two-day deliberations. Mr. Gurdep Singh, Member of the Senate, also attended the forum.

