Dear Mr. Joseph Jerald, Tom Lantos Institute and the UN officials who have organized this august forum, eminent guests to this forum and everyone listening to this forum, I thankful to each one of you.

Sir, **When I ask question that less in number in society mean the community or group can be rightfully deprived of its dignity? The answer is no. Should the smaller groups be made to realize that they are inferior and their culture is alien and foreign? Every civilized nation will answer big no.**

**Does it mean the minority, based on religion, culture and ethnicity, will be removed from mainstream politics and economically deprived of decent jobs and business opportunities?**

**Are the laws of a country meant to give confidence of citizenship only to the people who are in the majority? Or the purpose should be to provide assurance and protection to the smaller entities?**

I am from Pakistan and come from a Christian background. When I ask these questions, I find people suspect my loyalty to my country, despite everyone believing that answer to these questions is simply “NO”.

Pakistan is a country located in South Asia with a population of 210 million. The country comprises five provinces, which are entirely different in culture, language and topography. Pakistan was created in 1947 as a homeland of Muslims who believed that being a minority in India, they would never be able to prosper. The founder of Pakistan, Mr Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, guaranteed that Pakistan would never allow its minorities to suffer this sense of depravity that had in United India. The ideals were very high. Constitutionalism, equality, fraternity, social justice and democracy were the core principles. And minorities were to be dealt with generosity. However, as history unfolded, Pakistan could not appreciate its cultural, linguistic and religious diversity. Minorities and other smaller groups started the migration. Stringent laws were introduced. In the last two decades, my country has made significant progress in allowing diversity to flourish. However, I want to say that this is not enough.

As Pakistan is founded based on religion, faith is not a matter of personal choice. Even though 97 per cent of the population is Muslim, laws promote their religion. The Constitution of Pakistan defines that all laws will conform to the Holy Quran and the teachings of the Holy Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him). Our research on religious minorities, titled ***The Index of Religious Diversity and Inclusion in Pakistan***, shows that religious minorities are comfortable with Islam as the state religion. The challenge to them is the feeling of being second-class citizens. Although religious minorities are only 3 to 4 per cent, the president of Pakistan or the prime minister cannot be a non-Muslim. This symbolic exclusion serves as a guideline. There will be hardly a Muslim who will vote for a non-Muslim. From 1985 to 2002, non-Muslims were to vote for their coreligionists on a small number of seats reserved for them. These non-Muslims had no say in decision-making. Even today, there are separate reserved seats for non-Muslims selected by political parties. These parliamentarians serve only as a mouthpiece of their political parties but are of little value to their minority communities.

On this forum, I want to stress, we are not talking about minorities. Rather, we are talking about disadvantaged minorities. Our research shows that not all religious minorities are poor, forced into menial work, live in segregated neighborhoods and considered untouchable.

Christians and Scheduled Caste Hindus form the bulk of religious minorities. Both come from Hindu Dalit backgrounds and are treated as untouchable, but Pakistan officially claims that there is no caste system in Pakistan. Many members of these communities live in abject poverty, live in their separate ghettos and find that only the most menial jobs are left for them. Society particularly wants these two communities to work as toilet cleaners. Government job advertisements require only non-Muslims to apply for janitorial work. Why religion is the condition for cleaning floors and toilets? The state it needs to address is the social inequality and otherization that religious minorities suffer and the pressure they face to abandon their faith. It is a matter of further interest. Only Christians and Scheduled Caste Hindus are considered dark in colour. So, they are excluded and are a minority because of their religion, caste origins, and even skin colour. Those, who fare in colour, are told: “Look, you don’t look like a typical Christian.”

1. Pakistan must recognize caste-based discrimination. Without this, it cannot help irradiate racial, descent and work-based discrimination towards certain religious minorities and even Muslims from Dalit backgrounds.
2. The job quota introduced in 2009 for religious minorities be made more effective, especially for marginalized religious minorities. The disadvantaged minorities be provided decent jobs as well.
3. Pakistan should recognize cultural, ethnic and linguistic minorities and celebrate their distinctive identities at the national level. Signing the UN Declaration for Minorities can be a wonderful step in this direction.
4. The state introduce a policy of celebration of minorities and not assimilation of minorities.
5. No slogan of celebration of minorities is complete without taking them into policymaking and decision-making process.
6. Deal with the suspicion about minorities. Society must consider them from amongst them and not aliens or foreigners.