

**ADDRESS OF THE PRIME MINISTER
SYED YUSUF RAZA GILANI
ON OCCASION OF CHRISTMAS CAKE CUTTING CEREMONY
23rd December, 2010**

Mr. Shahbaz Bhatti
Federal Minister for Minorities' Affairs

Mr. Javed Akhtar
Secretary, Ministry of Minorities' Affairs

Excellencies,

Members of the Christian community,
Ladies & Gentlemen,

Assalam-o-Alakium

It gives me immense pleasure to be part of this Christmas cake-cutting ceremony today. On the happy occasion of birth of Jesus Christ falling on 25th December, I would like to felicitate the Christian community around the world especially those living in Pakistan on behalf of the government and people of Pakistan. The day highlights the sacrifices, teachings and exemplary character of Jesus Christ. Believing in the prophethood of Jesus Christ and Bible as a divine Book is part of our faith as the Muslims.

This common characteristic binds the Christian and Muslim communities in an unbreakable relationship of mutual trust, respect and brotherhood. Jesus Christ was an exalted Prophet of God who brought with him the message of love, peace and compassion for humanity. He advocated the noble causes of human equality, fraternity and solidarity. He chose to sacrifice his own life but refused to bow before the forces of oppression. The teachings of this revered Prophet of God continue to be as relevant today as they were at that time.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The world we are living in today is faced with dangers of grave nature. The threat to global peace and harmony comes from a handful of extremists who are bent on sowing the seeds of suspicion, hatred and malice among our respective communities. These narrow-minded elements are misinterpreting the teachings of our great religions to promote their nefarious agendas. The forces of terrorism and extremism threaten to bring down human civilization and destroy our shared values of love, peace and compassion for humanity. A handful of radicals with vested interests cannot and should not be allowed to play havoc with the future of our succeeding generations.

Ladies and Gentlemen

The nature of our multi-cultural and globalized world demands of us to join our forces together and put up a united front against contemporary challenges. We have shared stakes in the future and it is our collective duty to rise up as followers of our two great religions. We must build bridges and raze down walls that separate us.

On this occasion, I would like to quote a very famous incident from the Islamic history, which would illustrate the spirit of harmony and brotherhood between Islam and Christianity. Once a 40-member Christian delegation from Nijran came to hold dialogue with the Holy Prophet (Peace be upon him). The Holy Prophet (Peace be upon him) treated them as His personal guests and made them stay in the Prophet's Mosque. When the members of delegation enquired about the place to pray, the Last Prophet of Allah (peace be upon him) allowed them to pray in the Prophet's Mosque in accordance with their religious requirements. The human history fails to offer any such example of tolerance, harmony and brotherhood.

The founder of the Nation, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah had, while addressing the first Constituent Assembly of Pakistan declared the policy of equality, tolerance and social justice, I quote:-

“You are free, you are free to go to your mosques or other places of worship in this state of Pakistan. You belong to any religion or caste or creed that has nothing to do with the business of the state. We are starting in the day when there is no discrimination, no distinction between one caste, creed and colour. We are starting with this fundamental principle that we are all citizen and equal citizens of the State.”

I have already instructed the Ministry of Minorities to review its policies in accordance with the vision of founding father Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah. I am also pleased to know that on my directions Ministry of Minorities have taken successful steps to promote interfaith harmony to bridge the gap amongst the different faiths. It is about time we rediscovered and highlighted our shared commonalities and values in the larger interest of peaceful coexistence and development.

I call upon every one to pledge that we will collectively struggle for the betterment of society and welfare of the people of this country.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

On this auspicious occasion, I would like to pay tribute to our Pakistani Christian community for their valuable contribution to the national development. From defence to education to health, to politics and social welfare, there is not a single walk of national life which does not have the representation and contribution of our Christian brethren. They are equal partners in the national development side by side with their other countrymen. It gives me immense pleasure to say that all minorities in Pakistan enjoy equality of rights, religious freedom and security.

These rights and privileges are constitutionally guaranteed. During its stints in power, the governments of Pakistan People's Party formulated policies for the welfare and well being of the minorities in Pakistan. Establishment of an egalitarian society has always been the endeavor and policy of our Party. Shaheed Zulifqar Ali Bhutto, the founder of PPP, established the Ministry of Minorities' Affairs for the protection of rights of minorities and resolution of their problems. The present government has considerably increased the budget of the Ministry to ensure progress of the minorities.

We have also fixed a quota of 5% for the minorities for recruitment in the public sector. Similarly, we have also introduced reforms in other areas to enable the youths of minorities to stand on their feet. It is singular honour of the democratic government that we have declared the 11th of August as the Day of Minorities. The Government of Pakistan Peoples Party stands for equal rights for all citizens; we have always been making efforts for socio-economic uplift of the masses and bring them into the mainstream.

On this occasion I would like to announce:-

- i. I would direct CDA for allocation of land in Islamabad for the establishment of Interfaith Complex.
- ii. I would direct NAVTEC to establish Skill development centers for minorities in Islamabad in coordination with the concerned organizations.

I am confident that our minorities would continue to play their valuable role in the national development with renewed vigour and energy.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

In the end, let us pledge to work in unison for the promotion of peace and interfaith harmony. We must promote respect for our respective religious values and teachings. This is how we can make this world a hub of peace for our coming generations. I am reminded of the Quaid-e-Azam's address to the Parsi community of Sindh in 1948. The great Quaid said and I quote:

"I assure you Pakistan means to stand by its oft repeated promises of according equal rights to all its nationals irrespective of their caste or creed. Pakistan which symbolizes the aspirations of a nation that found itself to be a minority in the Indian subcontinent cannot be unmindful of minorities within its own borders."

Thank you very much
Pakistan Zindabad
