

NEWSLETTER

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WHEN HATE SPEECH PUTS COMMUNITIES AT RISK

A single unverified religious allegation can place an entire community in danger. Media coverage can give that allegation credibility—or expose its origins and bring threatened lives into public view.

Drawing on Jaranwala and international examples, this policy brief examines the choices that shape journalism's role in interfaith violence in Pakistan: whose voices are heard, how accusations are reported, and whether accountability continues after an attack. It offers practical steps for newsrooms, regulators, civil society and audiences to challenge collective blame and respond before violence unfolds. For readers concerned with minority safety and media freedom, it presents a timely agenda for making responsible, independent journalism part of prevention.



I am Shawana Khan, a law student from Quetta, and a PIPS Peace Observer.

I am a young student from Quetta, Balochistan, and a member of PIPS Peace Observers. For my proposed Social Action Plans in Quetta, I have planned an activity focusing on interfaith harmony. Recognizing the challenges faced by religious minorities and the importance of protecting freedom of belief and promoting equal respect, I aim to organize an interfaith dialogue at BUITEMS bringing together young people and representatives of different faith traditions, including Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and Sikhism.



EMPOWERING YOUTH WITH KNOWLEDGE OF INCLUSIVITY, TOLERANCE AND INTER-FAITH HARMONY

Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies conducted a two-day national workshop for Pakistani youth from diverse backgrounds. A group of 40 young people, referred to as "observers", attended the event organized by the Islamabad-based Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS). The youth represented local peacebuilders, members of minorities, teachers and students from colleges, universities and seminaries across the country.

MEDIA AND THE PREVENTION OF INTERFAITH VIOLENCE IN PAKISTAN

1. INTRODUCTION

Interfaith violence refers to acts of violence, intimidation, discrimination, or persecution directed against individuals or communities because of their religious identity or perceived affiliation. In Pakistan, such violence has often involved collective blame, where allegations against individuals have placed entire communities at risk. This can be seen from the attacks in Jaranwala on 16 August 2023, where a large-scale mob attack targeted the Christian community in Jaranwala (Human Rights Commission of Pakistan 2023). The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) documented attacks on multiple churches and Christian homes in Jaranwala following blasphemy allegations and announcements made through mosque loudspeakers (HRCP 2024, 32). The central issue was how an allegation could become a trigger for mobilisation against an entire community.

Interfaith violence is therefore more than a disagreement over religious beliefs. It includes assaults, killings, intimidation and destruction directed at people because of their actual or supposed religious identity. Like ethnic violence, faith-based violence can involve stereotyping, collective blame and unequal protection. Sectarian attacks and accusations against Muslims also share some of these features, but this does not mean that all of them can be considered interfaith violence. The UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) raised concerns in 2024 regarding discrimination and violence affecting ethnic and religious minorities in Pakistan, including attacks linked to accusations of blasphemy (CERD 2024, paras. 13–16).

Pakistan is not the only country facing this problem, though the political circumstances of other countries must be considered when making comparisons. In India, UN experts warned in March 2024 about reported violence against minorities and dehumanising rhetoric (OHCHR 2024). During the political upheaval in Bangladesh in August 2024, Hindu representatives reported attacks on homes, businesses and temples. Reuters could not independently verify the scale of these attacks (Paul and Das 2024). In Sri Lanka, UN experts received reports of anti-Muslim attacks and inflammatory online mobilisation in March 2018 (United Nations Special Procedures 2018). These cases show that minorities face insecurity under different arrangements of political power and institutional protection.

Another example is Myanmar. The Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar (IIMM) documented a military-linked Facebook hate campaign against the Rohingya during the mass violence in 2017 (IIMM 2024). The comparison concerns mechanisms through which communities can be portrayed as threats and subjected to hostility; it does not suggest equivalence between the scale, causes, or consequences of these cases.

Media is therefore an important part of this policy problem. Public communication can make accusations appear credible, spread them to more people and influence whose safety receives public attention and protection. It can also expose manipulation and demand protection for those at risk. This brief argues that media can help prevent violence depending on how it uses this power. This includes verifying claims, refusing to assign collective blame, representing threatened citizens and holding powerful people and institutions accountable. For this to work, the media needs both editorial independence and professional responsibility.

2. ROLE OF MEDIA

Media is important because it helps people understand public events. Editors decide which events receive attention. The way an incident is presented can lead audiences to see it as a religious offence, a disputed allegation or organised persecution. The choice of sources also affects whose account appears credible. Repeating and distributing a claim can take it from a local audience to a much wider one. These decisions can affect how people understand an event and what responses they consider acceptable. Media also influences what appears normal, whose testimony is taken seriously and which failures continue to receive public attention. Its power is therefore not limited to persuading people to believe a particular claim.

It must also be noted that professional journalism, organised propaganda, social platforms and local announcements do not all exercise this power in the same way. A broadcaster gives the information it publishes the credibility of its organisation. A platform allows information to circulate among its users. An extremist organisation deliberately promotes its own cause. Their roles cannot simply be treated as the same. However, professional newsrooms have an important position among these different sources of communication because they can confirm, challenge or give greater publicity to material that comes from elsewhere.

A historical comparison is provided by media involvement in the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda. The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda's "Media Case" examined the roles of RTLM radio and Kangura newspaper. In 2003, the trial chamber convicted three media leaders of genocide and related crimes (International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda 2003). On appeal in 2007, some convictions were reversed and sentences reduced, while convictions for direct and public incitement to genocide were upheld against Ferdinand Nahimana and Hassan Ngeze (International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda 2007, 20–21). The relevance to this brief lies in the use of communication to mobilise hostility and legitimise persecution. Rwanda is therefore used as a comparison involving ethnic targeting, rather than as an example of interfaith violence.

Myanmar provides an example involving different technology. The IIMM identified a coordinated, military-linked network of Facebook pages that distributed anti-Rohingya hate speech in 2017 (IIMM 2024). In Sri Lanka, UN experts recorded allegations that activists used social media to spread inflammatory anti-Muslim statements and calls for violent action in 2018 (United Nations Special Procedures 2018). The problem in these cases goes beyond inaccurate information. Communication can identify targets, place blame on an entire community and encourage people to join an existing campaign.

The same power can also be used to prevent violence. To begin with, verification can stop a rumour from gaining credibility through a news organisation. Reporting on those organising an attack can expose deliberate efforts to mobilise people. Interviews with threatened residents can bring their safety to public attention. Scrutiny of police action and later proceedings can also challenge the ability of perpetrators to avoid punishment. These efforts are useful before, during and after violence. However, their effect depends on whether the information reaches the relevant audiences and whether institutions act on it. Reporting alone cannot guarantee protection.

These foreseeable consequences place responsibilities on journalists. Accuracy requires them to distinguish an accusation from an established fact. Avoiding harm requires them to consider whether identifying a person or repeatedly broadcasting an allegation will put that person in danger. Fair representation requires minority citizens to be heard as people with knowledge of their circumstances, rather than appearing only when there is a controversy about them. Independence allows journalists to investigate both those spreading inflammatory claims and officials who fail to protect people at risk.

Impartiality also requires judgement about evidence and power. Giving an accusation and its denial equal airtime does not mean that both are equally credible. This is particularly important when one participant can mobilise people to intimidate another. Also, correcting a false allegation does not resolve the question of whether collective punishment would be acceptable if the allegation were true. The media has a responsibility to make clear that an accusation does not give anyone a right to use violence.

In its 2024 assessment of Pakistan, CERD connected the protection of journalists, media pluralism, fair representation of minorities and responsible reporting (CERD 2024, para. 14(h)). This connection is important because credible journalism needs both the freedom to examine those in power and the responsibility to avoid putting people in danger. These requirements support each other.

3. PAKISTANI MEDIA'S HISTORICAL RECORD

Pakistan's media has gained greater power to communicate with the public, but this has not guaranteed responsible reporting. The expansion of private electronic media following the establishment of PEMRA's regulatory framework in 2002 gave audiences more broadcasting choices than they had under the earlier state-dominated system. Qureshi et al. (2015, 50, 58) also identified competition over ratings, breaking news and controversial content. Their analysis highlights an important problem during this period. A greater number of media outlets created more opportunities to scrutinise public affairs, but commercial competition could also reward speed and spectacle.

This problem is particularly serious when reporting religious accusations. Verification may require time, knowledge of local circumstances and a decision not to broadcast material that would attract an audience. Competition can instead reward the outlet that is first to repeat a dramatic claim. The contribution of commercial media therefore depends partly on whether the pursuit of audiences allows for restraint when publicity itself can put someone at risk of attack. Decisions by owners and those commissioning reports must also be considered when assessing editorial performance.

Digital publication has made the position of professional journalism more complicated. Newsrooms now operate alongside political accounts, religious figures, activists and informal networks which can spread claims before reporters have investigated them. The credibility of journalism is particularly important in these circumstances because so much information arrives without verification. Simply repeating what is circulating gives an unreliable claim the authority of a news organisation. So, as more people gain access to publication, it becomes more important to distinguish reporting from repetition.

There are also examples of Pakistani journalism challenging persecution. Ashfaq's (2015, 8–12) study examined coverage in Dawn, The News and Daily Times during the week following the 2014 lynching of the Christian couple Shama and Shahzad. It identified 60 news stories and six editorials. Of these news stories, 29 reported condemnation and calls for action. This shows that minority persecution received attention in the English-language newspapers included in the study. Such reporting can make violence a matter of public accountability and show that the actions of the perpetrators are being challenged.

However, attention after an atrocity is not enough to assess the contribution of journalism. Ashfaq's study covered three newspapers over one week. It therefore leaves questions about reporting in other languages, broadcasting and coverage during ordinary periods. The main issue is whether reporting continues. This includes whether threatened communities receive attention before violence, whether journalists investigate how attacks are organised and whether investigations and recovery are followed afterwards. Only four stories in Ashfaq's sample placed the attack within a wider pattern of violence against minorities (2015, 9). A report that repeats condemnation can record a response without establishing who organised the violence, whether warnings were ignored or whether prosecutions made progress. Accountability therefore depends on the questions journalists pursue, not just the number of reports they publish.

Broadcasting has also provided examples of editorial failure. One example is Geo's 2014 apology over anti-Ahmadi broadcasting (Dawn.com 2014). Another is PEMRA's 2017 action concerning Aamir Liaquat's programme, which involved the televised discussion of blasphemy allegations and related concerns over potentially harmful content (Reuters 2017). The issue in these cases is not limited to whether a particular programme can be proved to have caused a particular attack. A broadcaster must exercise judgement before publication, when it needs to consider the danger that can reasonably be foreseen. Waiting until physical harm can be demonstrated would be an inadequate ethical standard.

There is an important difference between reporting an accusation and giving it authority. A report can explain that an allegation exists, investigate where it came from and assess the danger surrounding it. A public accusation by influential figures can make the allegation appear equivalent to a verdict, especially when speakers are given prominence without their evidence being examined. In these circumstances, choosing a guest, headline or identifying detail can change the level of danger a person faces. Responsibility therefore lies with newsroom procedures and senior management as well as individual presenters. Regulatory action is also an incomplete way to assess this responsibility. A sanction does not show what standards a newsroom follows every day or establish that the people targeted have become safer. The more demanding question is whether verification and restraint take place before publication.

The case of Jaranwala also shows why every failure in communication cannot be attributed to mainstream journalism. HRCP identified mosque loudspeakers as an immediate means of mobilisation (HRCP 2024, 32). Professional journalists did not originate or control every message circulating in those circumstances. Their responsibility concerns how they used the information available to them. This includes whether their coverage explained what was uncertain, recognised the threats to residents and examined action taken to protect them. Journalism is therefore part of a wider network of people and institutions whose messages carry authority. However, this complexity does not remove editorial responsibility.

The quality of reporting also depends on the resources that organisations provide. A 2021 study compared 52 digital stories produced with mentoring and technical support with 48 stories from the websites of five legacy media groups, monitored between 1 June and 15 September 2021 (Naeem, Alam, and Rehmat 2021, 14–16). Research or data providing context appeared in 54 per cent of the supported stories and 6 per cent of the legacy sample (Naeem, Alam, and Rehmat 2021, 34–35). The supported journalists had been asked to incorporate features that were subsequently assessed, including relevant research and data (Naeem, Alam, and Rehmat 2021, 14). The findings therefore show differences between stories produced with different forms of support. They cannot establish the effect of mentoring alone or show a national pattern.

That said, the comparison draws attention to what editors commission and fund. Reporting on minority communities requires access, verification and knowledge of the institutions that affect their lives. If coverage focuses on dramatic incidents, audiences have fewer opportunities to learn about these communities through their work, education, culture and public service. The existing studies do not establish how common this imbalance is across Pakistan. However, they show why representation needs to be assessed by more than whether openly hostile language is absent.

Finally, journalists can face costs for making responsible decisions in a threatening professional environment. Freedom Network's 2026 report recorded 129 verified incidents of violations against media and its practitioners between May 2025 and March 2026. These included 58 incidents involving legal pressure: 37 threats of legal action and 21 instances of actual legal action (Rehmat and Khattak 2026, 19). These monitored incidents concern journalism generally. They do not measure interfaith reporting specifically. However, they show why personal courage cannot replace protection from an organisation. Pakistan's media record reflects a combination of editorial decisions, resource constraints and external pressures. Some reporting exposes persecution, while other practices give dangerous claims greater authority.

4. How the State and Civil Society Strengthen or Weaken Media's Role

The state affects the media's ability to prevent violence through its treatment of journalists and its conduct towards threatened communities. Protection from intimidation and access to reliable official information make independent reporting easier. On the other hand, pressure to suppress inconvenient accounts can stop journalists from identifying danger or exposing failures. State involvement therefore needs to be assessed through the conditions it creates for scrutiny as well as the messages it publishes.

CERD made this connection clear in 2024 when it called for effective implementation of the Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals Act 2021, an independent safety commission and support for ethical reporting and minority representation (CERD 2024, para. 14(h)). These were recommendations at the time. They do not establish that these arrangements were already effective. The connection matters because journalists who cannot safely question an accusation or investigate official inaction will be less able to protect the public from dangerous misinformation.

The state's own conduct also affects whether public messages are considered credible. Pakistan has set out alternatives to extremist violence. The policy of the National Counter Terrorism Authority addresses minority protection, interfaith dialogue and media engagement (NACTA n.d., 1–3 and contents). These commitments provide standards against which the state's performance can be assessed. However, publishing them does not show that local officials consistently follow them or that affected communities are safer. The National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) provides evidence of this difference. Its 2026 report on the Ahmadiyya community records harmful official conduct alongside protective interventions and stronger action against perpetrators towards the end of 2025 (NCHR 2026, 9–19, 26). Ahmadis generally identify as Muslims, while Pakistan's constitutional framework classifies them as non-Muslims. The differences in official responses are important. Assurances of protection lose credibility when authorities give way to intimidation. Effective intervention, however, can give those assurances meaning.

Scrutiny by the media is therefore part of making public communication credible. Journalists need to examine claims of coexistence against what happens when people ask for protection. Broad restrictions on expression can weaken this role even when they are justified as measures against misinformation. The problem for governance is how to deal with incitement while preserving scrutiny of the officials responsible for dealing with it. Official control over information does not by itself make that information reliable.

Civil society can strengthen journalism by providing evidence, specialist knowledge and relationships with communities that newsrooms may have difficulty reaching. HRCP's investigation of Jaranwala shows the value of documentation that connects an attack to mobilisation and institutional failures (HRCP 2024, 32). The study of minority reporting also shows the role of civil society in commissioning and supporting coverage that provides more context (Naeem, Alam, and Rehmat 2021).

These contributions still need to be examined by editors. Advocacy organisations have their own mandates, groups they represent and limits on resources. Their accounts need corroboration and cannot automatically be taken to represent every affected person. Some organisations may have better access to certain communities than others. Threatened residents may also be unwilling to speak publicly. Relying on a small group of intermediaries can therefore leave some people excluded even when the reporting is sympathetic. Also, assistance from these organisations cannot replace police protection or a newsroom's responsibility for what it publishes. The strongest relationship is one in which independent documentation supports independent journalism, allowing cooperation while journalists retain their own judgement.

The media's ability to prevent violence ultimately depends on how it uses its authority. Verification, fair representation and continued scrutiny can help stop an accusation from becoming a basis for collective blame. For this to happen, journalists need both the freedom and the means to question powerful people and institutions. State protection and civil society support can strengthen this ability when they preserve editorial independence and make clear who is responsible for public decisions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Government regulation should provide the minimum safeguards needed to reduce the risk of media communication contributing to interfaith violence. At the same time, it should avoid controls that weaken independent journalism. To begin with, print, electronic and social media operate differently. This means that they should not all be regulated in the same way. PEMRA should require broadcasters to adopt specific editorial safeguards for religious content with a potential risk of harm. This includes reports of blasphemy allegations, religious denunciations or claims that may expose an identifiable person or community to violence. Such reports should undergo additional verification and review by senior editors. Broadcasters should also consider whether disclosing identifying information is necessary in the public interest. The purpose here is not to prevent the reporting of religious controversies. It is to ensure that broadcasters do not present an allegation as if it were a verdict or make an unverified claim appear more credible by repeating it. The same principle should guide the Press Council of Pakistan in developing clearer guidance for print and online news organisations. This guidance should cover allegations involving religious identity, blame directed at an entire community and reporting involving minorities under threat. Regulation should focus on whether reasonable procedures were followed before publication. Relying mainly on penalties after harmful material has already circulated does little to address the decisions that allowed its publication. Social media requires a different approach because platforms do not exercise the same editorial control before publication as professional news organisations. Government policy should therefore establish clear procedures for reporting content that poses an immediate threat to identifiable individuals or communities and referring it for urgent action. Restrictions should also be transparent and subject to meaningful review. Broad powers to deal with misinformation should not become a way to prevent journalists, researchers or citizens from examining the conduct of public officials. This balance is important because the media has two responsibilities in prevention. It must avoid spreading dangerous claims and also examine whether institutions have protected those at risk.

Media self-regulation is also an important part of prevention. Regulation cannot supervise the large number of decisions that journalists and editors make every day. Professional media bodies and individual news organisations should therefore develop a common protocol for reporting religious accusations and interfaith violence. This protocol should require journalists to distinguish clearly between an allegation and an established fact. It should also require them to avoid unnecessary repetition of inflammatory claims and consider whether publishing names, images or locations could place people in danger. The actions of an individual should not be presented as the responsibility of an entire religious community. These requirements should form part of each organisation's code of ethics and editorial procedures. Treating them only as general professional ideals will not make them part of everyday reporting. Stories carrying a high risk of harm should be referred to senior editors before publication, particularly where mobilisation or intimidation is a foreseeable danger. It must also be noted that responsibility does not lie only with reporters and presenters. Editors, producers, programme commissioners and owners influence the selection of guests, headlines, programme formats and the commercial pressure to publish quickly. They should therefore also be included in systems of accountability. Larger organisations should establish an ombudsman, public editor or equivalent standards officer. This person should receive complaints, examine disputed coverage and publish

findings on whether the organisation followed its own rules. Professional bodies can support this work by developing shared standards and providing a forum for complaints that do not immediately require state intervention. Training should also be continuous. Occasional workshops on tolerance are not enough to prepare journalists for the practical problems they face. Journalists and editors need instruction in verification, investigation of digital sources, relevant legal issues, conflict-sensitive reporting and the protection of vulnerable sources. They also need training in covering minority communities outside periods of crisis. Media organisations should periodically review their own reporting. They should examine whether minorities appear mainly when there is a controversy, whether affected citizens are treated as credible sources on their own circumstances and whether cases are followed after the immediate violence has ended. These measures would make self-regulation a set of procedures that can be assessed in everyday editorial work, rather than leaving it as statements of principle.

Civil society can strengthen these safeguards by providing independent evidence, specialist knowledge and access to communities that journalists may find difficult to reach. One useful measure would be a network for rapid verification involving fact-checking organisations, journalists, human-rights groups, researchers and trusted community contacts. When a religious allegation, photograph, video or inflammatory claim begins to circulate, participating news organisations should be able to obtain timely help in establishing its origin and reliability. This assistance should be available before they decide whether to reproduce the material. This is particularly important online, where claims can spread faster than conventional reporting can investigate them. Civil-society organisations and universities can also help by regularly monitoring media coverage. An independent media observatory could examine the publication of unverified allegations, blame directed at entire communities, inflammatory language and the representation of minority voices. It could also examine whether news organisations continue to investigate accountability after an attack. Making these findings public could put pressure on media organisations to improve without giving the state additional control over editorial decisions. Training and support should also extend beyond major national newsrooms. District correspondents, regional-language media and smaller digital organisations may have fewer editorial resources. Yet they can be closest to the places where rumours and local mobilisation begin. Training, directories of sources and access to specialist knowledge can improve their ability to verify sensitive claims. That said, cooperation with civil society should preserve journalistic independence. Advocacy organisations have their own mandates and limitations. Their accounts should therefore be examined as evidence rather than accepted automatically. The most useful arrangement is one in which civil society improves access to information while news organisations remain responsible for verification and editorial judgement.

Readers and viewers also have a role in preventing harmful communication. They should not be treated simply as passive recipients of what the media publishes. Media literacy programmes should give audiences practical skills for dealing with religiously sensitive information. These include distinguishing allegations from verified facts, checking the original source of images and videos and recognising inflammatory or dehumanising language. Audiences should also learn to avoid passing on identifying information that could place an individual or community at risk.

Such programmes could form part of education, public-interest broadcasting and civil-society initiatives. Readers and viewers should also be encouraged to challenge inaccurate or inflammatory reporting through established complaints mechanisms, newsroom ombudsmen, professional media bodies and independent fact-checkers. This should not become organised harassment of journalists or an attempt to suppress reporting. The aim should be accountability based on evidence. Audiences can ask for sources, identify misleading headlines, request corrections and report false content through the appropriate channels. They can also circulate verified corrections instead of repeating the original allegation. In this way, readers and viewers can reduce both the incentives for sensational reporting and the speed with which unverified claims come to be accepted as credible. Together, these four areas of reform would place responsibility on the institutions that regulate the media, the organisations that produce its content, the civil-society actors that can help with verification and the audiences that receive and redistribute information. The central objective should be to intervene before harmful communication contributes to collective blame or mobilisation. Condemnation and punishment after violence has occurred should not be the main response.

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Empowering Youth with Knowledge of Inclusivity, Tolerance and Inter-Faith Harmony

Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies conducted a two-day national workshop for Pakistani youth from diverse backgrounds. A group of 40 young people, referred to as “observers”, attended the event organized by the Islamabad-based Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS). The youth represented local peacebuilders, members of minorities, teachers and students from colleges, universities and seminaries across the country.

Experts have stressed the need to address structural imbalances in society by resetting the existing system to achieve “positive” peace, noting that mutual trust and collaboration can help initiate and strengthen the peacebuilding process in Pakistan.

Mr. Imran Mukhtar, a senior journalist and media coordinator at PIPS, started off by differentiating between human rights and fundamental rights. He stated that human rights are basic freedom that belong to all humans. He further explained that right to life, freedom from torture, freedom of speech, freedom of religion and political rights are some of the examples of human rights. He then elaborated on fundamental rights and expressed that these rights are given by the constitution of any country. The session went on to elaborate that all human rights are fundamental rights but all fundamental rights are not human rights.



In the next session, Ghazi Salahudin, a senior journalist, talked about collective sense in a society. He emphasized that collective apathy should be overcome. He quoted international examples where societies responded to adversities in a positive manner. He explained how youth in Pakistan could take inspiration from them. He quoted examples from Srilanka, Bangladesh and Nepal where Gen Z was active and took active part in society’s reformation. He also emphasized the importance of reading in enhancing potential of youth.



These sessions were followed by lunch. After the break, Afshan Huma, an educationist, conducted an interactive session on peace building through education. She engaged the observers by asking what peace meant for them and whether they were living in peace. The participants enjoyed discussing and answering these questions.



The last session focused on Proposal Writing and Social Action Plans (SAPs). This session was conducted by Areeba Waseem who is the Program Manager at Pak Institute for Peace Studies. The session explained that a SAP is a small, locally designed and community-led initiative developed and implemented by trained PIPS trained Observers in collaboration and cooperation with the local peace actors to promote interfaith harmony, peaceful coexistence, inclusion and diversity, reduction of hate speech, protection of minority rights, freedom of religion or belief (FoRB), community resilience against extremism.



The observers were given a chance to brainstorm ideas for their respective SAPs. The session concluded with a group activity where groups were given previous SAPs' proposal reports and implementation reports, and asked to critically engage with them.

The next day started off by sharing ideas for SAPs. Observers were given a chance to share their ideas and gain feedback from their fellow observers. After this session, Safdar Sial, Joint Director PIPS and Research Analyst, urged the youth to model psychological resilience, saying, "This will help counter radicalization in your own lives and in every community where you live or work".



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Jorin van den Heuvel, First Secretary (Political) at the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to Pakistan, interacted with the participants and responded to their questions. He said youth were the future of Pakistan.



"Peacebuilding is possible only in our society when we develop consensus through effective communication," said Dr Khalid Masud, ad hoc member of the Shariat Appellate Bench of the Supreme Court. To avoid hate speech, he said all communication should be carried out responsibly. He said communication in Islam had four key features: accepting difference of opinion, maintaining respect and courtesy, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong (Amar Bil Maroof Wa Nahi Anil Munkar), and promoting accountability.



PIPS President Muhammad Amir Rana summed up the second day and called for reducing hatred and promoting greater compassion in daily life. "Communication is effective only when it is based on truth," he said.



MEET THE OBSERVERS

In this section, we asked some of the PIPS trained observers to give an insight into their backgrounds and ideas for Social Action Plans.

Muhammad Jawad

I am Dr. Muhammad Jawad, an MBBS graduate from Ziauddin University, Karachi. I have always been interested in community welfare, public health and working with people from diverse backgrounds. During my academic journey, I have been involved in student council activities, debating, writing, health camps and different community-based initiatives. These experiences have made me realize that creating a peaceful and inclusive society requires more than just talking about tolerance; it requires bringing people together and giving them opportunities to understand and support one another.



My social action plan is closely linked with my background in public health and community welfare. As a doctor, I believe that medicine can be used not only to improve people's health but also to bring communities closer. Health is something that connects all of us, regardless of our religion, culture or background. I want to use this common ground to bring young people from diverse communities together and promote tolerance, peace, inclusivity and a sense of shared humanity.

1. Workshop on Basic Medical Emergencies: Interfaith community service through health

My first idea is to organize a workshop on handling basic medical emergencies, followed by practical demonstrations led by trained medical professionals. The workshop will bring together young people from different religious backgrounds and teach them how to respond to common medical emergencies.

The purpose will not only be to provide them with useful medical skills but also to give them an opportunity to work and learn together. When young people from different communities come together to help and serve others, it can help break stereotypes and build trust between them. In this way, healthcare can become a means of bringing communities closer and promoting interfaith harmony and social cohesion.

2. "My Faith, My Message of Peace"

My second idea is a short video and poster campaign based on the theme **"My Faith, My Message of Peace."** Participants from different religious communities will be invited to share short messages about how their faith teaches peace, compassion, tolerance and respect for others.

These short videos can then be shared on social media to reach a wider audience. I believe this activity can help people understand different faiths from the perspective of their followers and highlight the common values that connect us. Rather than focusing on our differences, the campaign will focus on the shared message of peace and humanity present across communities.

3. Peace Speech Challenge

The third activity I have in mind is a ****Peace Speech Challenge**** aimed at reducing hate speech and discriminatory language. Participants from different religious backgrounds will be given examples of inflammatory or biased statements and asked to turn them into respectful and inclusive statements.

This activity will help participants understand how words can sometimes create divisions and reinforce stereotypes. It will also encourage them to think before they speak or share something online. By learning how to respond to sensitive issues without hatred or discrimination, young people can become positive voices for peace and tolerance in their communities.

Through these activities, I hope to use my background in medicine and public health as a way of bringing people together. My aim is not simply to conduct awareness sessions, but to create opportunities for people from different communities to interact, work together and recognize the humanity they share. I believe that when we use something as universal as healthcare to serve others, it can become a powerful bridge between communities and contribute to a more peaceful, tolerant and inclusive society.

Muhammad Saad

My name is Muhammad Saad bin Ilyas, and I am from Islamabad. I completed my eight-year Dars-e-Nizami programme (equivalent to a 16-year Master's degree (M.A.) in Arabic and Islamic Studies) from Jamia Islamia Imdadia, Faisalabad, in February 2025, followed by a one-year specialization in Ifta from the same institution. During this period, I had the opportunity to serve and guide people through approximately 135–140 written fatwas.



My interests include communication, public speaking, teamwork and leadership. I am particularly interested in promoting social cohesion and peaceful dialogue among young people in Pakistan's diverse society. I believe that differences in ethnicity, religion, sect and opinion should be approached through mutual respect, constructive dialogue and a willingness to understand different perspectives.

I have served as a Prefect during my school years and captained my school football team, leading it to the quarter-finals of the Federal Board Inter-School competition in 2016. In 2014, I represented Islamabad at the domestic level through the Pakistan Football Federation (PFF) under-14 nation-wide football tournament. I have also secured academic positions during my Dars-e-Nizami studies and conducted a successful project on interfaith harmony at PIPS.

My experience as an Observer has been particularly valuable. It has given me the opportunity to interact with young people from diverse backgrounds and to better understand the gap that sometimes exists between madrasa and university students. I have found that meaningful interaction and dialogue can challenge stereotypes, reduce hesitation and help young people understand one another beyond preconceived notions. My broader vision is to contribute to a reformative and intellectually conscious movement that nurtures young people into thoughtful, capable and socially responsible individuals. I believe that lasting change begins with individuals, and that by developing their character, intellect, vision and sense of responsibility, we can contribute to building a society that promotes peace, welfare and positive change and serves both the nation and humanity.

For my SAP, I am interested in developing an initiative focused on Youth for Peaceful Dialogue and Social Cohesion. Through dialogue sessions and interactive activities, I would like to bring young people from diverse ethnic, religious, sectarian and educational backgrounds together to develop skills such as active listening, interfaith harmony, peaceful coexistence, community resilience against extremism, constructive communication, critical thinking, reduction of hate speech and respectful disagreement.

Going forward, I intend to pursue an MPhil at the International Islamic University Islamabad, potentially in Usul al-Din or the Study of Religions, followed by a PhD. I hope to contribute to society through education, research and initiatives that promote mutual understanding, peaceful dialogue and social cohesion.

Kiran Kumari

I am Kiran, a youth leader, community development practitioner and facilitator working at the intersection of health, education, gender equity and social inclusion. My work has focused on engaging young people and underrepresented communities through awareness, dialogue, capacity-building and community-led initiatives.

I have experience facilitating youth and community sessions, working with diverse groups, and supporting initiatives related to gender equality, education, climate resilience and social j



ustice. I am particularly passionate about creating spaces where people from different backgrounds can listen to one another, challenge stereotypes and build mutual understanding.

SAP idea

"One Baithak, Many Stories"- A Community Dialogue for Inclusion and Peaceful Coexistence.

The SAP would bring 15–20 people from diverse backgrounds together for an interactive dialogue. Through storytelling, small-group discussions and a "Common Ground" activity, participants would explore diversity, stereotypes, respectful communication and peaceful coexistence. The session would conclude with participants developing practical commitments for building more inclusive and harmonious communities.

Sidra Akram

Sidra Akram is an MPhil scholar in Islamic Studies. Her thesis focused on Islam and Science, exploring the relationship between Islamic teachings and contemporary scientific thought. She has experience in education, having worked as a teacher, coordinator and school principal, along with her involvement in youth engagement and peacebuilding initiatives through PIPS. She is committed to contributing towards a society free from hatred, prejudice and extremism by promoting dialogue, tolerance, inclusion and peaceful coexistence.



Rough Idea of SAP: "Bridging the Gaps: Building Respect Across Communities"

The SAP aims to reduce sectarian and social divisions within the local community by creating opportunities for respectful interaction among people from different schools of thought. It will also bring madrasa and university students together to challenge stereotypes, reduce misconceptions and recognize their shared values. Through interactive activities and dialogue, the initiative will promote mutual respect, understanding and peaceful coexistence.

Muhammad Bakht Jamal

My name is Qari Muhammad Bakhat Jamal Harooni. I am an Islamic scholar, Qari, Hafiz-e-Quran and Quran teacher based in Lahore. I am associated with PIPS as a Youth Observer and have a strong interest in peacebuilding, dialogue, tolerance and social harmony.



Shawana Khan

I am a young student from Quetta, Balochistan, currently pursuing my 6th semester of BS Human Nutrition & Dietetics at the University of Balochistan alongside my 2nd-year LLB studies. As a member of the PIPS Youth Observatory cohort 2025-27, I have developed a strong interest in youth engagement, peacebuilding, social cohesion, and community development. My experiences in youth-focused and community initiatives have strengthened my communication, teamwork, coordination, and leadership skills.



For my proposed Social Action Plans in Quetta, I have chosen two themes that reflect the importance of inclusion, mutual respect, and social cohesion in a diverse community. The first focuses on interfaith harmony. Recognizing the challenges faced by religious minorities and the importance of protecting freedom of belief and promoting equal respect, I aim to organize an interfaith dialogue at BUIEMS bringing together young people and representatives of different faith traditions, including Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and Sikhism. Through dialogue and interactive activities, the initiative will encourage mutual understanding, challenge misconceptions, and highlight shared values of dignity, respect, and peaceful coexistence.

The second initiative focuses on peaceful coexistence among Quetta's diverse ethnic and cultural communities, including Baloch, Pashtun, Punjabi, Hazara, and others. Rather than focusing on differences, the initiative will create a space for young people to interact, discuss stereotypes and misconceptions, develop respectful communication, and explore constructive ways of resolving differences. Through dialogue and collaborative activities, the initiative aims to strengthen mutual understanding, cooperation, and social cohesion. Through these initiatives, I hope to use youth engagement and dialogue to build bridges across religious, ethnic, and cultural differences and contribute, in my own capacity, to a more inclusive, respectful, and peaceful Quetta.

Dr. Nimra Zahid

I am Dr. Nimra Zahid, a PhD Scholar at CUVAS, Bahawalpur. In my academic journey, I have authored several national and international research publications. Alongside, I have been associated with PIPS for the past year, where I have successfully conducted several Social Action Projects (SAPs). I am honored to be a Gold Medalist from the Youth Parliament Punjab, and a recipient of the Nissa Award by the Government and the Youth Leadership Award from South Punjab. Currently, I am serving as the President of the Roots Revival Society and General Secretary at VLG.



About PIPS

Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) is an Islamabad-based research and advocacy organization. The Institute offers a range of consultancy services through a combination of independent research and analysis, innovative academic programs, and hands-on training and support that serve the following basic themes: Conflict analysis and peacebuilding, dialogue, prevent/counter violent extremism (P/CVE), internal and regional security, and media for peace and democracy. PIPS conducts structured dialogues, focused group discussions, and national and international seminars to understand the issues listed earlier and also strengthen partnerships. The outcomes of PIPS research and planned events have extensively been reported in the mainstream media which adds to its credibility as an active and well networked civil society organization. PIPS policy reports and recommendations on security and CVE have frequently been cited in various works and included in state policy debates and documents. Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) conducted a research study in 2024-25 under the title "Building Bridges, Fostering Tolerance and Inclusivity among Youth". The program was particularly designed to engage Pakistan's youth from diverse backgrounds. The participants belonging to Madrassas, universities, media and social activists were engaged to strengthen their support for freedom of faith, and religious tolerance and harmony. It builds upon the philosophical approach that youth are part of a solution to challenges thrown by violent extremism and communal and sectarian discord.



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