



An open letter to the people of Pakistan
December 23, 2010

Dear Friends:

I write to you as an Anglican priest and the Executive Director of United Religions Initiative (URI), a global interfaith organization with over 500,000 members in 78 countries, including Pakistan, to appeal for an end to blasphemy convictions.

In 2001, I had the privilege of traveling to Pakistan during the observance of the Year of Quid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, a founding father of Pakistan. I met many extraordinary leaders of diverse faiths on that visit, all of whom spoke movingly of Mr. Jinnah's vision for Pakistan as a country where people of all faiths would live together in peace, enjoying equal rights and an equal access to well being. Mr. Jinnah spoke the following words about his vision for Pakistan in February 1948:

The constitution of Pakistan has yet to be framed by the Pakistan Constituent Assembly. I do not know what the ultimate shape of this constitution is going to be, but I am sure that it will be of a democratic type, embodying the essential principle of Islam. Today, they are as applicable in actual life as they were 1,300 years ago. Islam and its idealism have taught us democracy. It has taught equality of man, justice and fair play to everybody. We are the inheritors of these glorious traditions and are fully alive to our responsibilities and obligations as framers of the future constitution of Pakistan. In any case Pakistan is not going to be a theocratic State to be ruled by priests with a divine mission. We have many non-Muslims — Hindus, Christians, and Parsis — but they are all Pakistanis. They will enjoy the same rights and privileges as any other citizens and will play their rightful part in the affairs of Pakistan.

I pray that this magnificent vision from the founding of Pakistan will hold sway, not only in Pakistan but throughout the world, during these troubled times when cultures of extremism pose such a profound threat to human well being.

I pray, too, for the day when the people of Pakistan live in peace and prosperity, when Pakistan is a model of peaceable coexistence for the world, and the people of Pakistan live, as they did for so many years, without a blasphemy law.

Faithfully,

The Rev. Canon Charles P. Gibbs
Executive Director, United Religions Initiative (URI)