



Editor's Note

Sectarian violence and religious extremism have in recent years devoured thousands of lives in Pakistan. Top professionals and prominent voices have in particular been targeted to create panic and unrest in the society. Deeply concerned, Peace and Education Foundation (PEF) has trained more than 13 thousand faith leaders since its creation in 2009 to promote a counter narrative to violent extremism in Pakistan.

The present issue of the newsletter provides a glimpse of PEF peace-centric activities in the country. We look forward to your feedback and comments.



Countering Sectarian Narratives in Pakistan

Peace and Education Foundation (PEF) has launched Sectarian Reconciliation Narrative through unprecedented collaboration with leading Sunni and Shia religious leaders representing four provinces of Pakistan. Main objectives of this crucial project are:

- Increasing the role of religious clergy and laity in peacemaking and reconciliation with other sects and minority faiths;

1. Amplify a narrative of coexistence within and across sectarian divides;

- Increasing the capacity of religious peacemakers;

1. Diminish the level of violence and conflict driven by sectarianism.

Pakistan is home to an incredible diversity of Islamic communities, with the second largest population of Muslims in the world. Though various sects have existed side by side for generations, a surge in violence inspired by sectarian animosity has left thousands of people dead in the past decade. This bloodshed has been fueled by extremist organizations—which propagate intolerant and exclusivist ideologies. These extremists galvanize popular support by declaring that certain Muslim traditions and communities are deviant and present foreign interests. This violence has contributed to broader instability in the region, and there is a desperate need to shift the national discourse in this amazing and religiously-diverse society to promote a culture of harmony and tolerance.

PEF has developed, in collaboration with religious leaders, a comprehensive research that debunks extremist narrative that leads to widespread violence. We then developed educational tools and training programs to disseminate this counter-narrative to the large numbers of communities that are affected by sectarianism.

PEF overarching reach into communities: Faith Leaders capacitated to Counter-violent sectarianism

PEF has first trained then involved faith leaders – **Peace Advocates** – to disseminate the narrative in Punjab, the epicenter of sectarianism in Pakistan. Peace Advocates organized more than 50 events in carefully selected parts of Punjab to promote the narrative. These events engaged over 3,500 people directly, while print and social media

“It is still very hard for People at large to believe that leaders of different sects can sit across the table in Pakistan and come up with a roadmap to address the problem of sectarianism and extremism. Thanks to PEF, we’ve rediscovered that diversity is the will of God.”

coverage of these events reached more than 50,000 people.

**Dr. Abdul Hafeez, PEF Peace Advocate,
Faisalabad**

Southern Punjab focus of 2nd phase of ‘Peace Champions’



Peace and Education Foundation (PEF) has launched the second phase of its project Peace Champions. Building on successful piloting, the project aims at empowering the religious leaders with knowledge and skills to promote inter-faith and sectarian harmony in the society.

Focusing Southern Punjab, the project would provide an opportunity to PEF to engage 50 faith leaders, representing all major sects and religions in Pakistan, to counter violence and hatred in the society. They would be trained and will engage their communities to promote inter-faith and sectarian harmony and dialogue. Over a period of six months, more than 2,500 people will be educated directly

Capacity Building Workshop for PEF Partners Organized



Peace and Education Foundation organized a specially designed two-day training workshop for its Implementing Partners (IPs) in July. Thirty leading faith leaders, representing different religions, sects and seminaries, participated in the workshop.

“I’m a known Christian faith leader and a strong believer in inter-faith harmony. Notwithstanding that, my interaction with the people of other religions has been pretty limited. To tell you the truth, no credible platform was available for that. Through PEF, we’ve covered a lot of distance towards inter-faith harmony and stand committed to take it farther”

Priest Samuel Nawab, Lahore

through this project in the most vulnerable communities.

In the first phase of the project, 150 faith leaders were engaged to promote a message of peace in three districts of Punjab – Multan, Bahawalpur and Muzaffargarh. Through different activities, such as Friday sermons, seminars, round tables, sports galas and inter-faith and inter-sect exchange visits, the trained faith leaders engaged more than 2,500 people directly in the three districts.

EF believes in engaging like-minded organizations to disseminate the message of peace and tolerance across the country. It has also been instrumental in the developing new community based organizations, working for inter-faith and sectarian harmony in Pakistan.

“It should be taken full note of that faith leaders now stand for peace and inter-faith harmony, rather than extremism and violence. They are now part of the solution, rather than the problem”

Zubair Aslam, PEF Peace Champion, Multan



Transformed I stand!

“I always hated even the very idea of coming across people following other sects and religions. I was, in fact, trained at my seminary to keep them at an arm’s length. PEF training workshops on inter-faith and sectarian harmony provided me with the tools and resources to transform my hate into a peace-builder. Now, I regularly hold events to celebrate diversity and pluralism. My transformation has been an inspiration to many faith leaders in my community.”

Syed Asim Mahmood, Shaikhupura, Punjab

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