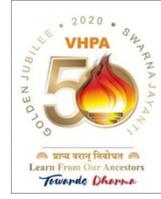




World Hindu Council of America (VHPA)



Ajay Shah

Executive VP, Awareness, Advocacy, Public Relations

Utsav Chakrabarti

Director, Public Relations

World Hindu Council of America (VHPA) Letter to St. Paul City Council

May 16, 2020

Respected Council Members,

World Hindu Council of America ([VHPA](#)) is one of the oldest American Hindu organizations. VHPA strongly opposes St. Paul City Council Resolution 20-712. We urge you to join Vice President Biden in showing compassion towards Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, and Christian refugees from Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Democratic Presidential candidate, Joe Biden issued a [statement](#) on May 15, 2020 that says, “I want to express my concern about the situation facing Sikhs and Hindus in Afghanistan, including the terrorist attack on Sikhs at the Gurdwara Har Rai Sahib in Kabul in March. Sikhs and Hindus are not outsiders living in Afghanistan. They are Afghan, and a vital part of the country’s heritage. The intense persecution these communities have faced in recent decades is an unspeakable tragedy. I vividly recall when, in the mid-1990s, the Taliban sought to make Sikhs and Hindus wear yellow to identify them as non-Muslims. The recent attack against Afghanistan’s Sikh community demonstrates once again the dangerous conditions for religious minorities. [...]. I stand with the Sikh and Hindu communities in Afghanistan seeking safety for their families and the freedom to practice their faiths, and urge the Department of State to consider the request for emergency refugee protection.”

In a statement, Democratic Congressman Ro Khanna has [stated](#) that, “Because the rampant religious violence against Afghan Sikhs and Hindus poses an existential threat for them, I urge the US Embassy in Kabul to refer Sikhs and Hindus still in Afghanistan for emergency refugee protection under the USRAP and for the Department of State and Department of Homeland Security to accept this referral without objection to ensure their safety [...]. There are deeply troubling reports of ties between the Pakistan’s Inter Services Intelligence and the terrorist organizations that carried out the 2018 and 2020 attacks, which warrant thorough investigation. [...] As US forces complete our departure from Afghanistan, I am deeply worried about the health and safety of Sikhs, Hindus, and other religious minorities under threat of religious persecution and genocidal violence in Afghanistan.”

India’s neighboring countries persecute minorities with impunity. Recently, a Hindu girl was abducted from her own wedding venue in Sindh province of Pakistan, converted to Islam and forcibly married to a person she never knew. Amidst the COVID-19 crisis, Pakistan [deprived](#) Hindu and Christian minority of food, unless they converted to Islam. A couple of months ago, a Hindu temple was ransacked in Pakistan, and the local Hindus were intimidated and forced to withdraw their complaints against four miscreants. In 2010, Asia Bibi, a Pakistani Christian had a simple argument with a coworker who then

accused her with blasphemy. Without any proof, Bibi was sentenced to death. Due to immense international pressure she was finally released in 2019.

Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Christians, Jews and other minorities have been killed, forcibly converted or driven out of their homes. Since India's independence, the Sikh and Hindu population in Afghanistan has dwindled from over 200,000 to fewer than a couple thousand. The Hindu population in Bangladesh has decreased from 30% to 7%. In Pakistan, it has been reduced from 12.9% to 1.6%.

Statements by Vice President Biden and Congressman Khanna are consistent with the American values of compassion for the victims of religious persecution. Cuban Adjustment Act (CAA) passed by the US Congress, provides a pathway to permanent residence for Cubans who were victims of communist oppression. The [Lautenberg Amendment to the Jackson–Vanik amendment](#) to the Trade Act of 1974. Enacted on November 21, 1989, specifically provides refugee status in the United States for nationals from the Soviet Union and later the former Soviet Union, Ukraine, Estonia, Latvia or Lithuania who are Jews, Evangelical Christians, Ukrainian Catholics or Ukrainian Orthodox; as well as nationals of Vietnam, Laos, or Cambodia; and Jews, Christians, Baha'is and other religious minorities from Iran.

The city of St. Paul has a rich tradition of compassion for persecuted minorities. In December 2019, St. Paul City Council passed [RES 19-2199](#), "Supporting the expansion of access to citizenship, lawful permanent residency, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), asylum, and other forms of immigration status and benefits; and opposing the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services' proposed fee increases, which would cause great harm to our city and substantially limit access based on wealth and disposable income." This bill declares that the City of St. Paul is a welcoming and inclusive city that welcomes immigrant and refugees; and, that the "asylum seekers have a legal and human right to seek asylum and our domestic and international obligations require that we allow them that right."

[Indian Constitutional Amendment Act \(CAA\), passed in 2019](#) expresses very similar sentiments. India, the largest democracy in the world, with its tolerant Hindu ethos has stood as a beacon of hope for persecuted minorities. The CAA declares India a sanctuary country for persecuted minority refugees from their tormentors driven by extremist Islamic religious frenzy and grants them priority immigration status. It states:

"Provided that any person belonging to Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi or Christian community from Afghanistan, Bangladesh or Pakistan, who entered into India on or before the 31st day of December, 2014 and who has been exempted by the Central Government by or under clause (c) of sub-section (2) of section 3 of the Passport (Entry into India) Act, 1920 or from the application of the provisions of the Foreigners Act, 1946 or any rule or order made thereunder, shall not be treated as illegal migrant for the purposes of this Act."

As a logical extension of Mr. Biden's support for evacuation of Afghan Hindus and Sikhs, the US must extend the "emergency refugee status" to Hindus and Sikhs of Pakistan. They face the same violent actors as their Afghan brethren and have been suffering a similar level of persecution. **As a compassionate city, the City of St. Paul should join the former Vice President and the Government of India in saving these persecuted religious minorities.**

St. Paul City Council Resolution 20-712 is an attempt to blame the victims and further victimize them by creating barriers against their asylum. The proponents of this bill are driven by extremism against persecuted minorities. The real purpose of this resolution is to create hatred for Hindus and people of

Indian origin residing in Minneapolis – St. Paul area. This resolution, if passed will lead to bullying of the children of Indian origin in schools and colleges and intimidate the hardworking people of Indian origin who work at the gas stations, 7/11s and motels among others.

We urge the St. Paul City Council to not be intimidated by those who seek to create hate and divide the community and reject this anti-American, anti-democratic, Hinduphobic resolution.

Sincerely,

Ajay Shah
Executive Vice President
World Hindu Council of America
ajayshah@vhp-america.org

Ajay Shah Executive Vice President, Awareness, Advocacy, Public Relations Email: ajayshah@vhp-america.org Phone: (858) 866-9661	Utsav Chakrabarti Director, Awareness, Advocacy and Public Relations Email: utsavc@gmail.com
World Hindu Council of America (VHPA) P.O. Box 2009 Natick, MA 01760 Web: http://www.vhp-america.org/ Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/VHPAmerica.org/ Twitter: @VHPANews Instagram: @worldhinducouncilvhpa YouTube: youtube.com/vhpavideos	