

Editorial

## **Pakistan: Protection for minorities**

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THERE is an urgent need to take seriously the threats being hurled at the Christian community in Peshawar. On Friday, members of the community met the police chief and told him about the threatening letters they had received, asking them to convert to Islam in 10 days or face dire consequences. The police have increased security vigilance in the Christian-populated areas although they suspect the letters could just be pranks as was the case a few months ago when the same thing happened in Charsadda. However, it will be unwise to take these threats lightly for there is every likelihood that they are seriously meant, especially given the current climate of religious extremism in the province. In May, it took a while for the police in Charsadda to respond to Christians' fears when they received threatening letters which apparently were bogus. But the letters did succeed in frightening the Christians in Charsadda, many of whom left the area. It also prompted some 100 Christians to write to the President and the Chief Minister of NWFP appealing for help to protect their lives. Threats were also hurled at a bible school in Peshawar earlier this year. These threats can no longer be ignored.

It is tragic that with each passing day, minorities feel increasingly unsafe in their own country. Every time a minority community or place of worship is attacked, members move out - be they Christians, Hindus or Sikhs who have been living in their areas for decades. Apart from beefing up security around sensitive areas, like places of worship, the government must engage all religious leaders in a dialogue on mutual tolerance and harmony. This is the only way a change in attitude can come about. Of equal importance is a change in discriminatory laws like the blasphemy law which is routinely misused against the non-Muslims.

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**P.S.**

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