

opposition of powerful Muslim clerics. Christians have also been subject to discrimination.

Increasing income polarization has sharpened existing social and economic disparities. The situation is compounded by the abject poverty that prevails throughout the country, which in turn supports odious institutions such as child labour. The rural masses, some two thirds of the population, are deprived of political participation, living under the dominance of feudal lords. Literacy rates are among the lowest in the developing world, particularly for women, whose rate is less than half the average rate for developing countries.

Worsening socio-economic conditions have contributed to the emergence of the "Kalashnikov" culture. The rich are heavily guarded and the powerful retain small private armies. Ethnic, sectarian, political and criminal violence are often intermingled and increasingly lethal due to the easy availability of weapons. The police are seen by most Pakistanis not as protectors but as oppressors. Torture, or even death, in police custody is not uncommon.

Karachi, Pakistan's largest city, has been gripped by escalating political and ethnic violence since 1990. The city has become increasingly lawless and chaotic as conflict sharpens between the government and the Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM). The Mohajirs, Urdu speaking immigrants from India who are hostile to the local Sindhi ethnic group, complain of government persecution and extrajudicial killings. The MQM has itself been responsible for numerous killings of political opponents and their supporters.

There are hopeful signs, however. In the last year, Prime Minister Bhutto has announced the end of the Speedy Trial Courts. Although the Anti-Terrorist courts will continue as before, the abolition of the Speedy Courts will take away a facility used by past governments largely to harass political opponents. The government has set up a number of advisory bodies related to women's development and human rights issues and female judges have been inducted into the high courts of Pakistan. A major breakthrough has been a recent Lahore High Court decision by a recently appointed female judge, ensuring a Muslim woman's unconditional right to "Khula" (divorce). The Court must now accept a Muslim woman's application for Khula without her having to establish grounds to end her marriage. A Ministry of Human Rights is being established, and this could lead to an independent human rights commission. In an important symbolic move, public hangings have also been banned.

CANADIAN POSITION

Canada has maintained a regular dialogue with Pakistan on human rights; this has often reflected the concerns of the Ahmadiya and Christian Pakistani communities in Canada with discrimination against minorities in Pakistan. Issues such as women's rights and child labour have also been addressed multilaterally and in meetings with Pakistani officials.

Canada has sought to engage the human rights issue in a constructive manner in Pakistan, providing support to human rights NGOs, training Pakistani officials in human rights in Canada, supplying information related to blasphemy litigation and conveying information on the establishment of the Ministry of Human Rights. Canada's contributions to Pakistan's sustainable development and growth help to address the basic socio-economic situation underpinning the evolution of a human rights culture.