

Human Rights Education and Pakistan

Samson Salamat

THE PAKISTANI HUMAN RIGHTS COMMUNITY boasts some of the world's most well-known activists as well as many national-level organizations that have led a long, arduous struggle for democracy and human rights since the military dictatorship in the 1980s. While these well-established human rights organizations have made significant efforts to develop the knowledge and skills of these activists for the most part this has been through project-related workshops that have limited focus on intensive, practical training. As a result, the second tier leadership of the human rights community has been slow to emerge. Moreover, these activists are confronted by challenges different from those faced by veteran human rights activists whose careers were defined primarily by opposition to military dictatorship.

While Pakistan's human rights situation remains dismal, with continuing violence against women, children, and religious minorities, extrajudicial killings and disappearances, sectarian strife, and widespread abuses by police, security forces, feudal lords, and others, the overall socio-political context faced by the younger generations of activists has transformed markedly. Society has become increasingly conservative and terrorism and other types of organized violence by non-state actors have grown out of state control. At the same time, the media is freer than at any time in the past and new communication tools and techniques are available to the current generation.

To deal with these new challenges and leverage new technologies, younger activists must overcome structural weaknesses within the human rights movement. Religious conservatives and non-state actors consistently charge that human rights and democracy represent a "Western Agenda," and many human rights activists lack sufficient clarity and understanding of these concepts to counter these charges at the grassroots level, or worse, they themselves may also subscribe to these beliefs.

Human rights activists, especially those working in rural areas where human rights violations are most serious, have great commitment but lack the skills and resources as compared to groups working in urban centers.

Furthermore, many organizations in Pakistan do not have well institutionalized decision-making processes, systems, or internal democracy, which hampers an organization's sustainability, transparency, capacity to network and form vibrant coalitions, and ability to remain effective over time. In addition, Pakistan lacks centers for human rights education, which can be found in many other countries, dedicated to strengthening the knowledge and skills of human rights defenders and the institutionalization of human rights work more broadly.

Centre for Human Rights Education- Pakistan

The Centre for Human Rights Education - Pakistan (CHRE) emerged in this context in 2010 and has been operating in the challenging environment since its formation. Over the last few years, it has been focusing on multiple themes to address and counter the situation - Democratic Development, Peace and Tolerance and Human Rights.

It is now a reputed organization among the civil society for its courageous standpoint on human rights issues and timely initiatives against religious extremism, intolerance and terrorism and its qualitative training programs to produce the cadre of trained human rights defenders.

Objectives

CHRE envisions building the capacity of members of the civil society, communities and government institutions to foster a culture of human rights.

CHRE strives for the advancement of equality and respect for human dignity in Pakistan and around the world through human rights education programs, research and advocacy initiatives.

It has the following objectives:

- To build the capacity and knowledge of members of civil society groups, human rights defenders and officials of government institutions;
- To enhance the realization and understanding of Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other human rights standards;
- To research and advocate for policy and legislative reforms for the protection and promotion of human rights; and

- To develop strategic alliances and partnerships with like-minded individuals and civil society groups in order to carry forward its vision and mission.

Main themes of CHRE Education Programs

Respect for All

Development of a culture which believes that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights and everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, without any discrimination.

Freedom of Expression

Fostering of a culture which allows free expression of opinions and ideas, ensuring the democratic process is followed in decision-making which is not only important for individual dignity but also to participation, accountability and democracy.

Integrity

Working transparently as compatible to the vision and mission of CHRE. Creating and maintaining an environment conducive to following and implementing the systems of accountability.

Gender Mainstreaming

Expanding the scope of gender mainstreaming by maintaining the equal opportunity environment for men and women at all levels, ensuring the participation of women in decision-making through their presence in the Governing Body and maximum inclusion in programs.

Democratic Decision-making

Maintaining a democratic culture by ensuring that the decisions follow the democratic process, and the team members fully participate in discussions, deal openly with differences of opinion and hence play an important role in decision making.

Partnership building

Development of strategic alliances and partnerships with those committed to the advancement of democracy and human rights programs.

Main Programs

CHRE strives for the advancement of human rights through four main programs and all projects are designed and implemented under these programs according to specific needs:

- Capacity Building Program;
- Research and Advocacy Program;
- Partnership; and
- Consultancy.

Capacity Building Program

The CHRE Capacity Building Program aims to build the capacity and knowledge of members of civil society groups, human rights defenders and officials of government institutions for the advancement of a human rights culture.

The program has short courses on human rights, democratic development, gender equality, religious tolerance and harmony. These courses provide the foundation for research and advocacy initiatives.

The program aims

- To provide information and conceptual clarity on human rights, democracy gender equality, religious tolerance and harmony;
- To encourage the development of skills, and the formulation and application of policies, necessary to transform that information into practical professional behavior;
- To sensitize the participants to their particular role in the advancement of a human rights culture;
- To build partnerships and networking among the participants and their groups; and
- To facilitate planning and strategy development to translate the participants' learning into practice.

Each course has a duration of approximately one hundred forty hours. Graduates of the courses are called CHRE Alumni, who become members of alumni organizations that help to put their learnings into practice and are able to contribute to the over-all struggle of the civil society for the advancement of human rights.

Research and Advocacy Program

The Research and Advocacy Program focuses research on the following thematic issues:

- Human Rights;
- Gender Equality;
- Democratic Development;
- Religious Tolerance and Harmony.

The research follows innovative advocacy initiatives in collaboration with CHRE Alumni and like-minded organizations.

Partnership Building

CHRE serves as a Partnership Point for the Alumni, civil society organizations and state institutions working for human rights education. It adopts innovative and technology-friendly ways and means for partnership and network-building.

Activities and Initiatives

Trainings/workshops

Participatory Course on Democracy and Human Rights

CHRE annually organizes the Participatory Course on Democracy and Human Rights (PCDHR) since 2010. PCDHR is an in-depth long-duration learning program for human rights defenders, university students, journalists and political activists; which puts a strong emphasis on the transfer of learning. Therefore the participants are required to develop an individual plan to ensure that the learnings are put into practice.

The course is conducted using a participatory methodology to enhance the understanding of the participants on the concept of human rights and democracy and to strengthen their skills on effectively working for the protection and promotion of human rights.

The PCDHR has the following objectives:

- To provide in-depth knowledge on the concepts of democracy and human rights and the international human rights standards and mechanisms;
- To impart and strengthen skills-designing and implementation of the advocacy campaigns, proposal writing, report writing, research

tools etc. to enhance the ability of the human rights defenders to work effectively;

- To expose the participants to institutional approaches to help civil society organizations function more systematically and with transparency following democratic norms and values;
- To sensitize the participants to their role in protecting and promoting democracy and human rights;
- To empower and strengthen the second tier leadership within the human rights community;
- To build partnerships and networking among the participants and their groups; and
- To plan to strategize for “putting learnings into practice” through research and advocacy initiatives.

PCDHR consists of participatory techniques and methods which help to develop understanding on different social subjects, provide the opportunity to interact and to network with people from diverse backgrounds and from different parts of the country. It also provides an opportunity to learn about different ways and forums to highlight different social issues, which helps to practice the democratic values and respect of human beings and provides the opportunity to learn from renowned experts of different social issues.

CHRE believes in participatory learning approaches therefore the indoor and outdoor sessions/activities of the course are conducted in participatory methodology to enhance the understanding of the participants on the concepts of democracy and human rights and to enhance their skills on working effectively as human rights defenders.

The PCDHR curriculum has the following parts:

Part 1. Conceptual clarity and knowledge development

- Concepts of Human Rights
- Principles of Human Rights (universality, indivisibility, interdependence, equality, human dignity, respect and non-discrimination)
- Global Culture of Human Rights
- International Human Rights Mechanisms
- Democracy and its Principals
- Democratic Culture and its Requirements
- Democratic Governance and its Requirements
- Situational Analysis in the Context of Pakistan

- Historical and Political Overview of Pakistan.\

Part 2. Skill Development

- Advocacy Tools
- Media Management
- Planning and Organizing
- Report Writing
- Participatory and Rural Appraisal(PRA) Tools
- Proposal Writing
- Public Outreach and Mobilization (strategies for mobilizing effective campaigns).

Part 3. Putting learning into practice

- Preparation of Individual plans.

The participants are required to make individual plans for putting their learning into practice by designing advocacy and awareness-raising initiatives with the support of CHRE and their organizations. The individual plans focus on issues related to Democratic Development and Human Rights.

Participatory Course on Peace and Tolerance

The Participatory Course on Peace and Tolerance (PCPT) is a newly launched training program designed to strengthen concepts of non-violence,



PCDHR course participants.

Comments & Feedback

Environment of the course:

The environment of the course as well as of the institute and its management was very respectful, open, and cooperative. I would especially like to acknowledge the level of personal interaction of the staff and the participants. This environment had a twin effect. On the one hand, it pulled shy participants out of their cozy comfort zones and pushed them to share their opinions, ideas, and recommendations. On the other hand, it created a comfort zone for those (in this case I am the one) who were overzealous and worried to their bones lest they offend someone with their extrovert personalities. So it was a balanced environment, creative enough to learn, and disciplined appropriately to tame!

Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) Methodologies of the course:

The M&E methodologies put into practice during this session were also very good. The indicators set against those methodologies were relevant and reliable. All the forms ensured to not only measure the change of knowledge but also to identify the gaps in the content and the delivery of the content. The only gap that I found in the M&E methodology was that no indicator was set to measure the impact of different tools of teaching. For instance, there could be a question that would inquire about our preferences for the type of teaching tools like lectures, role-plays, group work/discussion, etc. As this indicator would have helped the project design team to come up with more innovation in the future. So, my argument here is that an indicator should be included in the M&E methodologies that would also determine the strength of a specific teaching tool for a specific module. In addition, some closed-end questioning techniques could also be utilized in the evaluation forms. - Nighat Anwar, a development practitioner from Society for Sustainable Development, Bagh, Azad Jammu & Kashmir. She attended the PCDHR in 2015/2016.

PCDHR means a learning to get [to] know [how to] probe in depth about human rights and democracy through practical [work]. PCDHR leaves strong impact on my personal life [by] changing my mindset [through] learning and practical environment and [my realization of . . .] the meaning of life and how I should spend my life respecting and caring [for] everyone's rights [as] the only way . . . toward peaceful life. After going through PCDHR my professional life changed a lot [too]. I become more caring about my family, colleagues, friends, neighbors and every human being in society respecting their rights and wishes and become equal positive thinker for all and feeling



Field work of PCDHR participants.

a true human being myself. - Muhammed Muhammed Asif Nadeem, a journalist who attended PCDHR in 2015.

It's a very well structured participatory learning course about the basic right that we have being a human and to understand the concept of true democracy. It's an opportunity to learn by listening, thinking, doing and sharing of ideas. I was able to view human as a human and not as someone who belongs to class, religion, gender, race ethnicity or any other division in our society. The knowledge and information that I get during the course will help me to make my university students on sociology to better understand the state of human rights and democracy in Pakistan. I can myself be a change agent and [make] more people [become aware] about human rights and [the] true spirit of democracy." - Nosheen Raza, Lecturer of Sociology at Karachi University. She attended PCDHR in 2015.

religious tolerance and respect for diversity including religious diversity in a multi-religious society for a peaceful co-existence. Moreover, to expose the participants to history of non-violent movements and international standards for peace and conflict resolution, promote volunteerism among youth and to develop their skills in promoting non-violence, religious tolerance and respect for diversity in the society through peaceful ways and means.

PCPT has widely been appreciated and a very significant impact has been observed through oral and written feedback given by its beneficiaries who are not only satisfied with their learning and self- transformation, but also are actively working in areas for the promotion of religious tolerance.

Content of PCPT:

Conceptual Clarity

- Introduction to the concepts of human rights and principles (non-discrimination, religious tolerance and respect for diversity including religious diversity in a multi-religious society);
- Philosophy of Non-violence and History of Non-violent movements;
- International Standards and UN Mechanism for Peace and Conflict Resolution;
- Impact of religious extremism and intolerance (in the context Pakistan);

- Role of civil society and other stakeholders for promoting religious tolerance and respect for religious diversity for a peaceful co-existence.

Skills Development

- Conflict Management;
- Advocacy and Lobbying;
- Creative Report Writing;
- Communication skills;
- Use of Social Media for promoting religious tolerance.

Comments & Feedback

PCPT for me, it's a family of learning and experiences, a platform that polish my personality. It gave me [an] opportunity to understand what others have to say and created [a] sense of tolerance to me. I was one of those who think that eating with non-Muslim is not right. However, after PCPT I believe religion and humanity do not stop us [from doing] this [and] I think I have turned more [tolerant]. My professional degree is in geology and I have to [meet] a lot of people as I am student and would be working in the field in the coming year. PCPT has transformed my personalities from Islam/Muslim into humanity, love, peace & care for all. - Ali Azhar, a student from Rawalpindi, attended the PCPT in 2015.

PCPT means [propagating] peace, tolerance and respect for equal rights of each & everyone without any discrimination. PCPT brought not only change in my personal life but also touched me on how to feel peaceful life. PCPT has [taught] new ways, ideas, and innovation in my professional life as a student of social [science] since I am now able to utilize my skills in new direction. - Zubair Ahmed Khan, a student from Peshawar.

The overall experience PCPT was very good. I learnt a lot of things related to human rights, peace, tolerance and the concept of *Rwadari*. The way to conducting lectures was awesome and [there] was a good activity on interfaith harmony that had contributed as a practical way for learning. I will try to participate in another course which will [focus] on the same work for peace. This training has great impact on my personality. - Amna Ibrahim from Lahore.

Putting Learnings into Practice

- Preparation of Individual Plans.

The Participants are required to make Individual Plans in order to put their learning into practice by designing advocacy and awareness-raising initiatives with the support of CHRE and their organizations. These Individual Plans should focus on issues related to Peace and Tolerance.

Advocacy Campaigns

CHRE, along with likeminded civil society groups and with the support of its Alumni who were trained through the training programs launched *Rwadari Tehreek* (Movement for Pluralism & Peace) in mid-2015. The movement aims to generate a debate on the importance of religious tolerance in a multi-religious society and to put pressure on the government, political forces, state institutions and other stake-holders to seriously address and counter religious extremism and religious intolerance in the society which has created an atmosphere of fear among the citizens and has upset public life, particularly for those belonging to religious minorities.

Pakistan's public culture in general is riddled with hard line views and elements that do not allow tolerance for divergent views. As a result, civil liberties are being drastically squeezed. A peaceful environment has become a dream and fundamentalism, extremism, hatred, discrimination and vio-



Oath for Peace ceremony.

lence have deepened in the society. The reversal of this challenging situation has become inevitable, but this is not easy. State institutions, political forces, media, civil society and most importantly, the people, have to play a very active role to undo what is happening and to do what is required to make Pakistan a better place to live for every citizen.

In this situation *Rwadari Tehreek* is trying to counter extremist mindset and to enhance the scope of peaceful co-existence in the country. *Rwadari Tehreek*, is a non-violent social movement which has been initiated by concerned citizens of Pakistan to counter religious extremism, intolerance and terrorism and to promote the respect of all types of diversity including religious diversity, religious tolerance and to bridge gap between people of different faiths and religions and from different walks of life.

Initiated in May 2015, *Rwadari Tehreek* has been widely hailed by the people of Pakistan. More than fifteen thousand people belonging to different sections of society including teachers, social and political activists, members of different political parties, journalists, lawyers, doctors, religious leaders of different religions, artists, and students are registered members while approximately five hundred civil society groups have formally joined *Rwadari Tehreek*.

Jamshed Iqbal, an Islamabad based-writer and radio producer, views *Rwadari Tehreek* as an exemplary initiative by saying that

when our stakes in sanity are higher than ever before; *Rwadari Tehreek* is doing direly needed work for a saner and safer Pakistan. It is engaging diverse communities as stakeholders. It is an indicator of its deeper understanding that conflict is natural but violence is not. This golden path will lead [the] movement to success because as it appreciates differences [it also] works on commonalities. What makes its work exemplary for today's peace builders is the path of non-violence which the movement has taken, and it is the only path which leads to peace. Likewise, [the] movement's devotion to spiritual principle of "peace within, peace without" makes it truly a native movement, and even more effective. No movement can succeed without public support. So, the greatest strength of the movement is its huge volunteer-base. Ever-growing force of *Rwadari* volunteers showcases our collective thirst for peace and, at the same time, unveils that we can no longer support violence by remaining inactive.

Rizwan Gill, a lawyer and political activist from Lahore, considers *Rwadari Tehreek* as a timely initiative and says that

Rwadari Tehreek seems to me like a cool breeze in this environment of terrorism and hatred among the society. It is a timely initiative by its members. Such an initiative was the need of the hour to give a counter narrative to terrorism and hatred. Needless to mention here that this noble cause is being pursued by its members by risking their lives as terrorism and hatred has grown to a very high degree and needs to be eradicated. I wish all the best to *Rwadari Tehreek* for a better Pakistan.

Rwadari Tehreek, in the beginning of 2016, has made a strong presence in Central Punjab, South Punjab, and North Sindh; and 2016 started with its successful launching of Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa while the ground has begun for mobilization and membership in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Gilgit Baltistan. The *Rwadari Tehreek* Team is still finding difficulties to step into Baluchistan for various reasons; however the team is already in contact with different people to explore the possibilities.

Rwadari Tehreek has made its place in social media which has helped a lot in popularizing the agenda of *Tehreek* and attracting youth. Amazingly, the national and local print and electronic media gave very significant coverage to the activities of *Rwadari Tehreek* which is a good sign for its future.

Rwadari Tehreek has temporarily been structured at Central, Provincial-Sindh, *Khyber Pakhtunkhwa* (KPK), and in Punjab while office bearers have been elected by the *Rwadari* Group Members in almost twenty districts.

Rwadari Tehreek has emerged as one of the most popular social movements in the current time and has not only responded to the emergencies but also initiated courageous campaigns asking the government to declare 16 December as National Day against Extremism and Terrorism and Token Hunger Strike to demand action against the banned outfits and hate speech. The campaigns showed the strength of the team of the *Tehreek* and it was hailed for taking up serious issues with a proactive strategy.

The Chairperson of the FATA Commission of Human Rights and Coordinator of *Rwadari Tehreek-FATA*, Zar Ali Khan Afridi, views *Rwadari Tehreek* from the perspective of FATA and says that

FATA comprised of a great chunk of people of religious minorities like Sikhs, Christians and others who now have left [the] area due to indecent behaviors of Muslim extremist[s] and now



Hunger strike against hate speech.

are in exile-like situations. In such circumstances a movement to promote harmony and tolerance among people was needed and there was a vacuum which needed to be filled. *Rwadari Tehreek* did fill this place and it came to Peshawar to establish its chapters at Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa and FATA levels. This movement was needed and a need of the hour and people in all breadth and width in KP and FATA appreciated it and hoped that a social harmony would be increased among different people of various schools of thoughts and religions in KP in general and in FATA in particular.

***Rwadari* (Pluralism) CARAVAN**

In order to respond to the wave of religious intolerance and to counter religious extremism CHRE, in collaboration with PAHEL Pakistan and 29 other organizations, held a *Rwadari* Caravan to generate a debate on the importance of religious tolerance in a multi-religious society and to put pressure on the government, political forces, state institutions and other stakeholders to seriously address and counter religious extremism and religious intolerance.



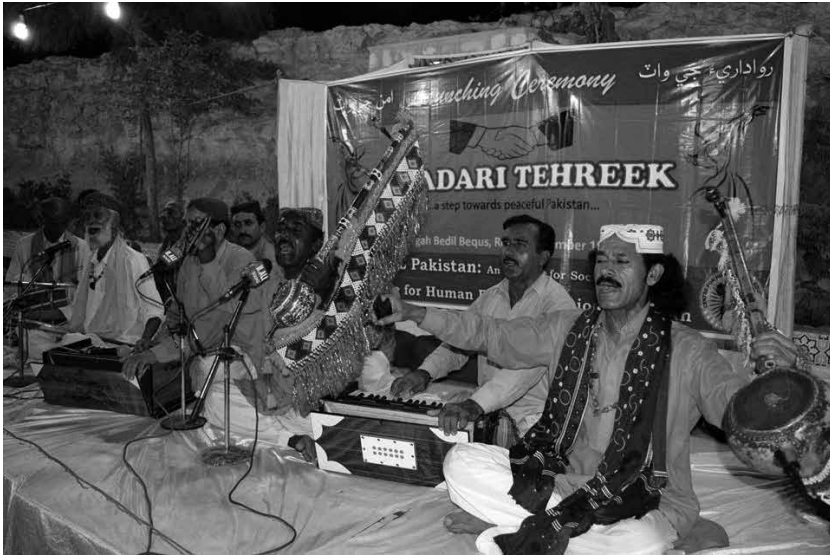
Appreciation from Muslim religious scholars.

erance in the society which has created an atmosphere of fear among citizens and has riddled public life, particularly for those belonging to religious minorities.

The Caravan began from Lahore on 14 March 2016 and ended at the Shrine of famous Sufi saint and poet of Sindh Hazrat Sachal Sarmast on 18th March 2016. Seventy members of CHRE and Rwadari Tehreek travelled from Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and were joined by many others from Sindh Province.

The Caravan travelled by road and was warmly welcomed in ten different locations on the way. On arrival at Sukkur, a rally was held which started from Sukkur Bypass and ended at Sukkur Press Club where a Press Briefing was held by the leadership of *Rwadari Tehreek*.

During its stay in Sukkur, the members of *Rwadari* Caravan held goodwill exchange visits of Imam Bargah, a Hindu Temple, a Church and shrines in Sukkur to express solidarity with the religious minorities and to spread the message of religious tolerance and respect for diversity for a pluralistic society.



Sufi (mystic) music at *Rwadari* festival.

***Rwadari* Festival**

CHRE organized the *Rwadari* Festival in 2014, 2015 and 2016 as annual programs which brings approximately 1,000 people of different faiths and walks of life at one platform to pledge for exercising *Rwadari* (Pluralism) and work for its promotion all around the country.

The following are the specific objectives of the *Rwadari* Festival:

- To enhance the scope of religious tolerance and respect of diversity in Pakistan's multi-religious, multi-cultural and multi-ethnic society;
- To display the expression of commitment and belief of people on *Rwadari* and sending a message of unity against religious extremism and terrorism;
- To put pressure on the government to express its seriousness and to take appropriate measures for the implementation of counter extremism and terrorism policies.

CHRE's alumni, volunteers and member-organizations from different parts of the country participate in the *Rwadari* Festival; CHRE likewise invites different civil society organizations as collaborators in the organizing of the festival.

The festival consists of different items including lectures on the importance of religious tolerance and respect for diversity in a multi-religious society, theater performances, speech competition for students, panel discussions, Sufi music performance, etc.

Democracy Festivals

CHRE held “Democracy Festivals” in 2013, 2014 and 2015 to commemorate International Democracy Day and International Human Rights Day with the theme “Non-Discrimination: The Basic Principle of Democracy” in different cities throughout Pakistan.

Why Democracy Festival on International Human Rights Day? Democracy and Human Rights are interlinked. Democratic values - freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, respect of human beings and their rights, right to vote through election, non-discrimination, respect for diversity, equal citizenship etc. are similar to the principles of human rights.

Since human rights are not being respected in Pakistan and violations of human rights are at such a large scale, the democratic system is not powerful enough and democracy is struggling to cement strong roots in society. Therefore, this situation requires greater support for democracy which could effectively protect and promote human rights. Human Rights Day is an international day which has enormous importance and impact. Therefore Democracy Festival was held on this day with the following aims:

- To show the commitment and belief of people of Pakistan on democracy and giving a message to every entity and anti-democratic force to respect democracy and to avoid derailing it;
- To make the democratic forces realize that they should follow the principles of democracy - equality, non-discrimination, rule of law, respect of diversity, etc.;
- To highlight and promote the culture of non-discrimination which is the core value of democracy and a basic standard of human rights.

The theme of Democracy Festival “Non Discrimination: The Basic Principle of Democracy”, is derived from Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Discrimination is prevailing in Pakistani society on the basis of faith, ethnicity, sex, political affiliation, language, language, social status, political

affiliation etc. Therefore this theme was selected to address the problem of discrimination and to demand actions to end all types of discrimination.

Campaign on Political Participation

In order to generate debates for a transparent and credible electoral process in the context of general elections in 2013, CHRE launched a campaign which included interaction with the political parties, the Election Commission, and awareness-raising forums to enhance the scope for transparency of the election process. At the same time, the Election Commission initiated significant changes in the electoral system and the citizens displayed greater sense of responsibility on their political participation, especially in the electoral process.

Frequent interaction with the Election Commission enabled a healthy working relationship with this important stakeholder. The Election Commission considers CHRE as one of the active and effective organizations and participates in the CHRE's activities.

CHRE's slogan for the Election Campaign "Paisay se na Josh se----Vote dalo Hosh se" (Not for money and Not emotionally--rather--Cast your Vote with Sensibility) has become a powerful slogan through frequent use of sms (short message service) technology, social media and public education materials.

The participation of the members of marginalized communities remained the priority, especially those of religious minorities and the transgender community of Pakistan. In a very rare attempt, a Charter of Demand was developed and announced for the political participation of the transgender community and a resolution was moved in the Provincial Assembly. It is very encouraging that members of transgender community from Multan, Sukkur, Gujarat, Karachi, and Sargodha contested in the general elections for the first time in the history of Pakistan, while women from FATA also contested the elections.

Concluding Remarks

CHRE is one of the most vibrant organizations at the forefront in responding to emergencies, e.g., protesting against incidents of terrorism, hate speech,

persecution of minorities, violence against women, torture and other human rights issues.

The response from CHRE comes through protest demonstrations, rallies and also through press statements. This is why the Facebook page and website of CHRE and of *Rwadari Tehreek* are quite popular in Pakistan.

But CHRE also believes in the slower process of increasing the capacity of human rights activists who have to continuously face various issues as part of their work. Thus, there is a need to ensure that their knowledge and skills as human rights defenders are adequate and their institutions are working properly not only to address human rights issues but also to operate based on democratic principles such as transparency and accountability.