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PAKISTAN CSW appalled and grieved by death of Shahbaz Bhatti

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) is today “appalled and deeply grieved” by the death of Shahbaz Bhatti, Pakistan’s Minister for Minorities Affairs. He was assassinated by gunmen today as he left his mother’s home for a Cabinet meeting.

Speaking at CSW’s London Conference in October 2009, Shahbaz Bhatti had said, “This position [as Minister] cannot change my determination to pursue justice, because I live for religious freedom and I am ready to die for this cause”.

CSW’s National Director, Stuart Windsor, said, “We are appalled and deeply grieved by this news. Shahbaz Bhatti was known personally to me for twelve years, and we worked closely with him on the causes which he passionately espoused. He was a true patriot who loved his country and wanted to see the realization of Jinnah’s vision of a harmonious, pluralist society. He never achieved what he dedicated his life to – the eventual repeal of Pakistan’s blasphemy laws. But he tried, bravely and with indefatigable spirit, and his life was a blessing to many.”

CSW’s Chief Executive, Mervyn Thomas, said, “Shahbaz Bhatti has tragically become another victim of violent intolerance and lawlessness in Pakistan. His loss will be felt keenly by all those pursuing justice and the rule of law. After the assassination of both Salman Taseer and Shahbaz Bhatti, many questions need to be asked about the government’s ability and willingness to protect those who speak out against extremism in Pakistan. They must bring to justice those responsible for these killings, without delay.

“Shahbaz always said that the power of the blasphemy laws lay in the social attitudes which underpinned them. He made it his goal to overcome faith-based divisions, and had already built unprecedented bridges between religious leaders in Pakistan. This was highlighted by the joint declaration he coordinated in July 2010, in which leaders of all faiths denounced acts of terror in Pakistan. His killing shows more than ever before the need for others to take up the mantle of his pioneering work.”