

October 13, 2006: Reciprocity is the Key - The Pilot

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In a Sept. 19 speech to the United Nations, Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf called on the western nations not to discriminate against Muslims.

"It is imperative to end racial and religious discrimination against Muslims and to prohibit the defamation of Islam," he said.

We can only agree with that sentiment. However, President Musharraf should have gone a step further. All racial and religious discrimination should end, not just discrimination against his own understanding of Islam.

In fact, religious freedom is far from a reality in his own country. In Pakistan, there is religious violence not only against Christians but among the different Muslim sects.

Archbishop Chaput has co-authored an opinion piece with Elizabeth H. Prodrromou, associate director of Boston University's Institute on Culture, Religion and World Affairs, responding to Musharraf's call for tolerance. Both are members of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom.

In the opinion piece published in The Denver Post, they say that, "Currently, sectarian and religiously motivated violence persists in Pakistan, particularly by Sunni Muslim militants, against Shiite Muslims, Ahmadis, Hindus and Christians... . Perpetrators of attacks on religious minorities are seldom brought to justice. Pakistan's nearly 4 million Ahmadis are prevented by law from fully practicing their faith."

Violations of religious freedom in Pakistan include "fatal violence against Ahmadis, torture of Christians, attacks against Shiite clerics and vandalism and destruction of churches."

The Ahmadis is a sect within Islam that is considered heretical by many other Muslims.

The authors also take on the treatment of the "defamation of Islam" under Pakistani law.

"Criminal penalties for blasphemy include the death penalty for anyone who 'defiles the sacred name of the Holy Prophet Muhammad,' life imprisonment for whomever 'willfully defiles, damages or desecrates a copy of the Holy Quran,' and 10 years' imprisonment for insulting the religious feelings of any citizen."

Dialogue between the West and Islamic countries is more important than ever. In the aftermath of Sept. 11 and the war on terror, it is imperative that communication flow and misunderstandings are avoided. But it has to be a two-way street. Reciprocity should be central to the advancement of dialogue with Islamic countries.

