



# DISTRICT PEACE COMMITTEES POLICY BRIEF

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

01	Background	02
02	District Peace Committee (DPC)	03
03	Successes	03
04	Challenges	03
05	Recommendations	04
06	References	04
07	Know Youth Development Foundation	05

# POLICY BRIEF

## District Peace Committees

### 1. BACKGROUND

In the recent past, Punjab province has seen incidents of violent extremism where the provincial government acted by booking 218 people on charges of hate speech and 4000 social media sites were blocked<sup>1</sup>. Religious intolerance was also observed as 42 cases of blasphemy were registered in a single month in 2020<sup>2</sup>. During Muharram 2020, the extremist elements attacked a procession in Chatuchak Okara despite mourners following the approved route<sup>3</sup>. During Muharram 2020, a Shia cleric allegedly insulted the companions of Prophet (PBUH) that called for his immediate arrest but fled the country on the same night due to fear for his life, and a case against him was registered<sup>4</sup>.

The various government agencies handled such incidents of extremism by engaging religious leaders at multiple levels to counter hate speech and resolve local conflicts. For example, the religious leaders played a role in pacifying people's sentiments during the Asia Bibi case in Multan, which resulted in peaceful and non-violent protests, unlike the protests in other cities such as Karachi. In 2018, NACTA developed Counter Extremism Guidelines that comprehensively covered various strategies to address multiple drivers of extremism. It recommended that Amman (Peace) Committees be established at all levels of administration, including Union Council, Tehsil and District administration, with a mandate to

ensure peace and interfaith harmony by engaging people of diverse backgrounds. It also encouraged these committees to conceive, develop and implement Community Engagement Projects. Recently, Special Assistant to Prime Minister (SAPM) on Religious Harmony has also announced forming Interfaith Harmony Councils<sup>5</sup> at all levels of administration in the country. In 2020, the Punjab Interfaith Harmony policy drafted by the Punjab Ministry of Human Rights, Minority Affairs, and Interfaith Harmony also recommended establishing peace committees at all levels of administration with the representation of youth and women<sup>6</sup>.

## 2. DISTRICT PEACE COMMITTEE (DPC)<sup>7</sup>

In each District in Punjab, District Administration notifies a committee comprising leaders of various religions and sects, local political leadership, civil society, business people, and representation of district administration. The membership<sup>8</sup> varies from District to District and depends on the district administration, determining who could better serve on the committee. Deputy Commissioner (DC) is the head of the DPC and chairs its meetings. Every year, its membership is reviewed by the DC, adding or removing any member from the DPC. The committee is mandated to support District and local government efforts to ensure peace, promote interfaith and sectarian harmony and resolve local conflicts in the district. However, it is observed that the DPC is more active and vibrant during days of religiously sensitive months, including Muharram and Rabi-ul-Awal. In Southern Punjab, DPC is also involved in District Multan that represents various religious denominations. These leaders also work with other peacebuilding platforms such as Multan Interfaith Forum and Bahawalpur Support Group.

## 3. SUCCESSES

- DPC is a body representing all major religions and sects and administrative and political leadership. District DC heads this body that works around issues of promoting interfaith and sectarian harmony.
- In the last decade, numerous cases of extremist violence depict DPC's significant work in resolving local conflicts by engaging religious leaders

of various denominations. In 2013, a conflict emerged on the Alm installation by the Shia community that led to violence series and imposition of curfew in the District Multan. With DPC deliberations with the top religious leadership, resolved matters amicably afterwards. In 2018, during the Asia Bibi blasphemy case when she was transferred to Multan, large-scale processions erupted in the district. However, with the support of DPC and other forums, including the Multan Interfaith Forum, not a single act of violence occurred in the District Multan.<sup>9</sup>

- In 2020, an alleged blasphemy case was registered against a local football company working for a foreign company in District Sialkot<sup>10</sup>. Local workers complained that name similar to Prophet Muhammad PBUH was printed on the footballs. Subsequently, various interventions were made, including the visit of DPC to the locality, engagement of the local religious leaders, and local notables. After unrest in the local people and case publication on social media, police registered an FIR on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2020. This matter was also referred to Punjab Muttahida Ulema Board (MUB) for opinion. After scrutiny by the local police and the opinion of the MUB, the accused were declared innocents.<sup>11</sup>

## 4. CHALLENGES<sup>12</sup>

- District Administration gives mandate to DPC on need basis and especially in months of religious sensitivity such as Muharram. When they are needed, they are called for; otherwise, they mostly remain lull.
- The DPC mandates are entirely dependent on the directions of the Deputy Commissioner and District Police Officer. When they are needed,

- they are called for; otherwise, they mostly remain on the papers.
- DPC do not have any technical, operation and logistic support from the District Administration. Therefore, the Deputy Commissioner being the chair, organize its meetings on a need basis in its own office.
  - In cases where DPC promotes interfaith and sectarian harmony and resolves local conflicts, no acknowledgement is accorded by the District Administration and provincial government.
  - There is a dearth of participation of women and youth in the DPC.<sup>13</sup>

- The District Administration should evolve a vibrant and robust coordination mechanism between the DPC and other forums such as Multan Interfaith Harmony, Bahawalpur Support Group, District Women Forum and newly announced Interfaith Councils. This will help the structures learn from each other, create synergies, and adopt best practices.
- DPC should have more visibility and work at the District and Provincial levels by documenting its efforts towards ensuring peace and harmony. Promoting the work of DPC will enhance ownership by various stakeholders in ensuring peace and harmony at the district level. In a recent move, Provincial Law Minister Raja Basharat met the DPCs; such meetings and briefings will give more visibility to their work. Conferences highlighting their work, key challenges and policy decisions can help DPCs to project their work.
- There is a need to diversify the membership of DPC by including youth and women members.

## 5. RECOMMENDATIONS

- The District Administration should give DPC a secretariat and support to hold its meeting every month to discuss the local situation and propose solutions to any untoward problem.
- A clear mandate should be developed and handed over to DPC members for their better understanding and adoption. TORs for the platform and its members should be drafted.

## 6. REFERENCES

1. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2262678/218-booked-over-hate-speech-during-muharram-463>
2. <https://nayadaur.tv/2020/09/42-blasphemy-cases-registered-in-pakistan-in-last-30-days/>
3. <https://twitter.com/mjibrannasir/status/1301521596935557120?lang=en>
4. <https://www.dawn.com/news/456692>
5. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1584950>
6. Draft Interfaith Harmony Policy
7. Information was collected from various previous members, including Maulana Khalid Nadeem, Abdul Haq Mujahid, Maulana Farooq Khan, and Khawar Husnain Bhutta from Multan, Syed Waseem Haider Gardezi, Hafiz Kazim Raza, Mufti Shabbir Anjum, Muhammad Zubair Abid, and Allama Abdul Mustafa Chishti from Lahore, and Safdar Kolachi from Bahawalpur of the District Peace Committees.
8. Lahore DPC membership is 41 as against different numbers in other District Committees
9. Short Interviews of religious leaders/members of DPCs, including Maulana Khalid Nadeem, Abdul Haq Mujahid, Maulana Farooq Khan, and Khawar Husnain Bhutta from Multan, Syed Waseem Haider Gardezi, Hafiz Kazim Raza, Mufti Shabbir Anjum, Muhammad Zubair Abid, and Allama Abdul Mustafa Chishti from Lahore, and Safdar Kolachi from Bahawalpur of the District Peace Committees were done. Other than these, members of Multan Interfaith Forum, such as Mujahid Abbas Gardezi, is also interviewed.
10. <https://nayadaur.tv/2020/05/blasphemy-case-registered-against-sialkot-football-maker-after-extremists-protest/>
11. Letter# 8174-A/L dated 20th May 2020 issued by the office of District Police Officer, Sialkot
12. Based on the interaction and discussion with various journalists, civil society members, and religious leaders, including Pir Ubaid Saddarpuri, Allama Mujahid Abbas Gardezi, Maulana Abdul Hanan Haideri, Maulana Abdul Majid Wattoo, Khawaja Abdul Aziz, The Media Foundation, Zain Baloch, Carnelian Pvt Ltd, Shahid Rehmat, Executive Director, Youth Development Foundation, Mumtaz Hussain, Executive Director, CHANGE and Hasnain Tirmizi, Program Manager, Media foundation360.
13. Letter# No.POB-1-22/2019 dated 04th November 2019 issued by the office of Deputy Commissioner, Multan

## 7. Know Youth Development Foundation

Youth Development Foundation (YDF) is a not-for-profit and non-governmental youth-led organization working on interfaith harmony, social inclusion, local government, preventing and countering violent extremism (CVE) since 2010. YDF brings together youth from diverse cultural, religious and geographical backgrounds to prevent and counter growing trends of extremism through innovative ideas that lead to demonstrable solutions. As a result, YDF has been able to bring positive cultural changes in three Pakistani provinces by directly engaging more than 12,000 young people in the last seven years. Due to its contribution to positive social change in Pakistan, YDF had the opportunity to present youth contributions in conflict mitigation at UN Minority Forum 2013, Geneva, UNAOC Global Forum 2016, Baku, and NEXUS 2016, New York. In addition, YDF has had the privilege to work with USAID, European Union (EU), UKAID, USIP, UN agencies, World Faith, and the Swiss Mission Office and Government of Punjab and Sindh. Furthermore, YDF works with multi-stakeholders, including District, Provincial and Federal governments, to promote youth-oriented policies and strategies that celebrate cultural, linguistic, ethnic, and religious diversity. Most recently, YDF has been working with the Ministry of Human Rights, Minority Affairs, and Interfaith Harmony on drafting a tolerance strategy for Punjab province and dedicated media campaign to counter discrimination, hate speech and stigmatization during COVID19.



@ydf\_pakistan



@YDFPakistan



@ydfpk1



@ydfpk



[info@ydfpk.org](mailto:info@ydfpk.org)



[www.ydfpk.org](http://www.ydfpk.org)

### Author

Mubashir Bukhari  
Journalist, Policy-maker,  
Faculty at Beaconhouse  
National University

### Review By

Shahid Rehmat  
Executive Director-Youth Development  
Foundation

&

### Production

Urooj Sindhu  
National Coordinator - YDF

Abdul Khaliq Dad  
Reporting & Communications Manager YDF

# #YDFPK