

Paul Bhatti, Pakistani Christian, stands against blasphemy law

by [Rosie Scammell](#) in the [March 2, 2016](#) issue

Paul Bhatti, a Roman Catholic, worked as a surgeon in Europe and in his home country of Pakistan. His brother, Shahbaz, went into politics and became Pakistan's only Christian cabinet member as the country's first minister of minority affairs.

On March 2, 2011, Shahbaz was cut down in a hail of bullets in an attack by a militant group that called him "a blasphemer." Pakistan's bishops have called on the Vatican to declare him a martyr.

"My life and profession changed after the assassination of my brother," Paul Bhatti said.

Bhatti was appointed minister for national harmony and minority affairs. He attended a recent conference in Rome on the persecution of Christians in Pakistan.

"Christian people somehow seem to represent the West," Bhatti said. "A lot of people have hatred in their hearts against the West."

Like his brother before him, Bhatti is campaigning for the repeal of Pakistan's blasphemy law, which dates back to British rule. Three death sentences were handed down in 2014 against people deemed to have defamed the Prophet Muhammad, though none of the executions has been carried out.

The blasphemy law is "is providing and enabling an environment for religious violence to take place," said Saroop Ijaz, Pakistan researcher for Human Rights Watch.

Ijaz argued that creating the ministerial post has not been enough to protect religious minorities.

"These roles become ceremonial positions, because from the highest levels of government you do not have the willingness to do something," he said.

Bhatti said educational change is needed.

“Some of the innocent Muslims who don’t have the possibility of engaging with Christians or other minorities genuinely believe that Christians or other religions are their enemy, because they’re told [that] by some people,” he said. —Religion News Service

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