

## HRW urges Pakistan to repeal discriminatory laws against Ahmedis

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Human Rights Watch (HRW) on Friday urged the government to immediately act to allow the full and equal participation of members of the Ahmadiyya religious community in the general elections scheduled for July 25, 2018.

HRW, in a statement issued, said that “the government should drop discriminatory provisions in the electoral law that effectively exclude Ahmedis because of their religious beliefs.”

To register as voters, Ahmedis must either renounce their faith or agree to be placed in a separate electoral list and accept their status as “non-Muslim”. Self-identification as Muslims, however, is the cornerstone of Ahmadiyya religious belief, and thus they end up not voting at all.

“The elections in Pakistan can’t be ‘free and fair’ if an entire community is effectively excluded from the electoral process,” said Brad Adams, Asia director. “Religious disagreements cannot justify denying people their right to vote.”

“The choice is between practically renouncing our faith or vote,” said an Ahmedi activist. “This is not a real choice. It would have been better had the government outright banned Ahmedis from voting since then they would rightly receive international criticism for doing that.”

“This is a vicious cycle,” said an Ahmedi businessman. “We are persecuted and discriminated by laws which ensure that we don’t get a voice in the parliament, and since we don’t have a voice, there is nothing that we can do to have these laws changed.”

Pakistani laws against the Ahmadiyya community violate Pakistan’s international legal obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), including the rights to freedom of conscience, religion, expression, and association; to profess and practice their own religion; and to vote



and be elected at genuine periodic elections. Pakistan ratified the ICCPR in 2010.

The HRW further said that the government of Pakistan should also investigate and prosecute as appropriate intimidation, threats, and violence against the Ahmadiyya community by militant Islamist groups.

“The Pakistani government’s continued use of discriminatory laws against Ahmedis and other religious minorities is indefensible,” Adams said. “As long as such laws remain on the books, the Pakistani government will be seen as a persecutor of minorities and an enabler of abuses.”

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