Human rights, fundamental freedoms, notably freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) are essential elements of EU-Pakistan bilateral relations, and form an important part of the EU-Pakistan Strategic Engagement Plan signed in 2019.

Since December 2020, two conferences on interfaith and intra-faith harmony were organised by the EU Delegation in Pakistan with the Chairman of the Council of Islamic Ideology. This led to the adoption of a Joint Declaration which affirmed, among other points, a strong condemnation of hate speeches against religion, race, colour, which can result in any form of harm.

In parallel, human rights issues are regularly addressed in established dialogue formats, i.e. in the Joint Committee and its Subgroup on Human Rights, in the Political Dialogue, and in the Strategic Dialogue. EU Special Representative for Human Rights Mr Eamon Gilmore visited Pakistan in February 2022 raising these issues with a wide range of stakeholders. In addition, on 31 March 2022, the United Nations Human Rights Council adopted a resolution on Freedom of religion or belief, which was sponsored by the EU in coordination with the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation.

The link between human rights and bilateral EU-Pakistan trade relations is made very clearly within the Generalised Scheme of Preferences Plus (GSP+). In particular, the issue will be addressed during the ongoing GSP + monitoring process, which covers the implementation of all 27 conventions identified under the scheme.

Due to its importance, the topic will remain a key priority in EU’s engagement and will be addressed in direct contacts but also through advocacy initiatives towards government interlocutors, policy makers and civil society representatives.

---