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PRESS RELEASE

EU Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief Concludes Official Visit to Pakistan

Islamabad, 13th September 2024: Ambassador Frans van Daele, Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) outside the European Union, has concluded his week-long visit to Pakistan. FoRB is a key priority for the EU, including in the context of the strategic engagement with Pakistan.

During the visit, he met Federal and Provincial Government officials, the Parliament, religious leaders, Non-Government and Civil Society Organisations, human rights defenders and local communities, to engage and exchange on the state of freedom of religion and belief in Pakistan and to foster the respect for diversity of religions and beliefs.

In his meeting with Chairman Senate Syed Yousuf Raza Gillani; National Assembly Speaker Sardar Ayaz Sadiq; Senator Azam Nazeer Tarar, Minister for Law and Justice, Human Rights and Parliamentary Affairs; Federal Minister for Religious Affairs Chaudhry Salik Hussain; the Special Envoy enquired about the challenges of freedom of religion or belief in Pakistan and mentioned areas of concern, in line with the last GSP+ monitoring report of November 2023.

The Special Envoy noted that the next GSP+ monitoring mission is expected in early 2025. He encouraged Pakistani authorities to continue implementing the relevant international conventions to facilitate Pakistan's reapplication for the trade scheme once the new Regulation on GSP is in force. In his interactions with interlocutors, Ambassador van Daele underlined the EU's continued support for and interest in enhanced cooperation with Pakistan.

Ambassador van Daele began his visit in Punjab, where he engaged with local communities in Jaranwala and Rabwah. In Lahore, he held meetings with Sardar Ramesh Singh Arora, Minister for Minorities Affairs, Government of Punjab; and Dr. Usman Anwar, Inspector General of Police Punjab.

He also expressed his appreciation for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' facilitation of his visit during a meeting with Pakistan's newly appointed Foreign Secretary, Ms. Amna Baloch.

The mandate of the Special Envoy involves raising awareness and engaging with state and non-state actors, civil society, churches, faith-based and religious organisations, as well as non-confessional organisations in order to prevent and address violations of the freedom of religion and belief.

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