

EDUCATING INTOLERANCE:

A Human Rights Assessment of Pakistan's Education Policies and School Textbooks for the UNHRC, UNESCO and the European Commission

GHRD Asia Team 2026

July 1st, 2026



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GLOBAL
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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Education is one of the most powerful tools available to any state. It shapes national identity, citizenship, social values and the attitudes of future generations. Inclusive education strengthens democracy, promotes social cohesion and contributes to peaceful coexistence among diverse communities.

This report examines concerns raised by Pakistani researchers and education experts regarding education policies, curriculum frameworks and public-school textbooks. The analysis focuses on the relationship between education, citizenship, religious identity and minority inclusion.

The report draws primarily on *Quality Education vs. Fanatic Literacy: An Analysis of Textbooks, Curriculum and Policies in Pakistan*, published by the Centre for Social Justice in October 2020.¹ Statistics are derived from a later publication by the Center for Social Justice, from 2025, ‘What Are We Teaching at School?: A Content Review of School Textbooks Published by Federal and Provincial Textbook Board in Pakistan’.² The source studies bring together research on education policy, textbook content in Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Sindh, Balochistan, and federal schools, academic freedom and the teaching of religion in South Asia.

- Religious minorities are insufficiently represented in educational narratives.
- National identity is often linked to a dominant religious framework.
- Compulsory or integrated religious content raises concerns under Article 22 of the Constitution of Pakistan.
- Human rights education and peace education remain underdeveloped.
- Academic freedom, critical thinking and independent inquiry require stronger protection.
- UN, UNESCO and EU engagement can support inclusive educational reform.

2. INTRODUCTION

¹ Abdul Hameed Nayyar, Anjum James Paul and Baela Raza Jamil et al., *Quality Education Vs. Fanatic Literacy: An Analysis of Textbooks, Curriculum, and Policies in Pakistan* (Center for Social Justice, October 2020).

² Faaria Khan, Shuneel Malik and Shafaq Minhas et al., *What Are We Teaching at School?: A Content Review of School Textbooks Published by Federal and Provincial Textbook Board in Pakistan* (Center for Social Justice, February 2025).

Education determines how nations understand themselves. It shapes how children learn to view their neighbours, their country and the rights of people who do not belong to the majority community. Pakistan is home to diverse religious communities, including Muslims, Hindus, Christians, Sikhs, Ahmadis, Kalash and others. A modern education system should ensure that every child feels equally represented and respected.

This report is designed as a policy-oriented human rights assessment for the UN Human Rights Council, UNESCO and the European Commission. It does not replace the original academic study. Instead, it converts the main concerns and recommendations into a format suitable for international advocacy, diplomatic engagement and institutional follow-up.

3. CONSTITUTIONAL GUARANTEES

Pakistan's Constitution contains important protections for equality, education and religious freedom.³ These provisions establish a clear national legal basis for inclusive education.

Constitutional Provision	Relevance to education and minorities
Article 20	Freedom of religion and belief.
Article 22	Protection against compulsory religious instruction relating to another faith.
Article 25	Equality before the law and equal protection of law.
Article 25-A	Right to free and compulsory education for children.
Article 36	Protection of the legitimate rights and interests of minorities.

The key legal concern is implementation.⁴ The presence of constitutional protections does not automatically guarantee inclusive educational practice. Curriculum design, textbook approval, teacher training and classroom practice must reflect these constitutional standards.⁵

³ Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan (1973).

⁴ Abdul Hameed Nayyar, Anjum James Paul and Baela Raza Jamil et al. (n 1), 127.

⁵ Abdul Hameed Nayyar, Anjum James Paul and Baela Raza Jamil et al. (n 1), 112.

4. INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS OBLIGATIONS

Pakistan has committed itself to international human rights frameworks that require equality, non-discrimination, protection of minorities and inclusive education.⁶ SDG 4 is particularly important because it calls for inclusive and equitable quality education for all.⁷ While the UNESCO Convention Against Discrimination in Education is pivotal in protecting human rights in educational contexts, Pakistan is not a signatory nor has it ratified the Convention.⁸ The following international instruments however do place human rights obligations on Pakistan:

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).⁹
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).¹⁰
- Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).¹¹
- Sustainable Development Goal 4 on inclusive and equitable quality education.¹²
- UN standards on freedom of religion or belief and minority protection.¹³

5. EVOLUTION OF EDUCATION POLICY

Since independence, Pakistan's education policies have reflected competing visions regarding the purpose of education. The 1947 Education Conference emphasised scientific advancement, technical education, economic development and character building.¹⁴ At the same time, early policy debates also introduced religious instruction as a central element of national education.¹⁵

⁶ Abdul Hameed Nayyar, Anjum James Paul and Baela Raza Jamil et al. (n 1), 12.

⁷ Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 'Goals: 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' (*United Nations*) <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal4#targets_and_indicators> accessed 29 June 2026.

⁸ UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (adopted 14 December 1960, entered into force 22 May 1962) 429 UNTS 93.

⁹ Universal Declaration of Human Rights (adopted 10 December 1948) UNGA Res 217 A(III).

¹⁰ International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (adopted 16 December 1966, entered into force 23 March 1976) 999 UNTS 171.

¹¹ Convention on the Rights of the Child (adopted 20 November 1989, entered into force 2 September 1990) 1577 UNTS 3.

¹² Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 'Goals: 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' (*United Nations*) <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal4#targets_and_indicators> accessed 29 June 2026.

¹³ UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief (adopted 25 November 1981) UNGA Res 36/55; United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 'International Standards: Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief' (*United Nations*) <<https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-religion-or-belief/international-standards>> accessed 29 June 2026.

¹⁴ Abdul Hameed Nayyar, Anjum James Paul and Baela Raza Jamil et al. (n 1), 17.

¹⁵ Abdul Hameed Nayyar, Anjum James Paul and Baela Raza Jamil et al. (n 1), 18.

Later policies increasingly linked education to state ideology and religious identity. The 1979 National Education Policy under General Zia-ul-Haq was a major turning point. It expanded the role of Islamic ideology in curricula, textbook development, teacher training and educational objectives.¹⁶ Later policies continued to reflect this orientation in different forms.

6. RELIGIOUS IDENTITY AND CITIZENSHIP

A recurring concern is the relationship between religious identity and citizenship. Educational materials can shape the message that students receive about who belongs fully to the nation.¹⁷ When national identity is presented primarily through one religious lens, minority students may experience indirect exclusion, even when formal access to school is legally protected.¹⁸

Equal citizenship requires a curriculum that allows all children to see themselves as full members of the national community.¹⁹ This includes acknowledging the contributions of religious minorities to Pakistan's development in education, science, medicine, public service, law, diplomacy, defence, arts and culture.²⁰

7. EDUCATIONAL EXCLUSION OF MINORITIES

The source study identifies underrepresentation and exclusion as major concerns.²¹ A community does not need to be directly attacked in a textbook to be marginalised. Invisibility can also create exclusion. When students do not learn about minority contributions or traditions, they may internalise a narrow understanding of national belonging.²²

- Minority contributions should be included in history, civics, social studies and language textbooks.²³
- Textbooks should avoid questioning the loyalty of non-Muslim citizens.²⁴
- Religious content related to the majority faith should not be placed in compulsory non-religious subjects for all students.²⁵

¹⁶ Abdul Hameed Nayyar, Anjum James Paul and Baela Raza Jamil et al. (n 1), 22.

¹⁷ Abdul Hameed Nayyar, Anjum James Paul and Baela Raza Jamil et al. (n 1), 11.

¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹ Abdul Hameed Nayyar, Anjum James Paul and Baela Raza Jamil et al. (n 1), 123.

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ Abdul Hameed Nayyar, Anjum James Paul and Baela Raza Jamil et al. (n 1), 77, 79, 82, 83, 90.

²² *ibid.*

²³ Abdul Hameed Nayyar, Anjum James Paul and Baela Raza Jamil et al. (n 1), 114, 130.

²⁴ Abdul Hameed Nayyar, Anjum James Paul and Baela Raza Jamil et al. (n 1), 114, 123, 128, 130, 131.

²⁵ Abdul Hameed Nayyar, Anjum James Paul and Baela Raza Jamil et al. (n 1), 114, 123, 130, 136.

- Ethics and alternative religious education should be available to minority students.²⁶

8. EDUCATION AND SOCIAL COHESION

Education can either reduce prejudice or reproduce it.²⁷ An inclusive curriculum can strengthen social cohesion by teaching dignity, equality, non-violence, mutual respect and shared citizenship.²⁸ A narrow curriculum that privileges one identity over others may contribute to segregation and intolerance.²⁹

For this reason, education reform should be treated not only as a technical curriculum issue, but as a national human rights priority and a long-term peacebuilding measure.³⁰

9. ACADEMIC FREEDOM

Academic freedom is essential for quality education. Students and teachers need space for critical thinking, open inquiry, debate and evidence-based learning.³¹ Educational systems that prioritise ideological conformity over critical engagement risk limiting intellectual development, innovation and democratic participation.³²

10. HUMAN RIGHTS IMPACT ASSESSMENT

The issues identified in this report have direct implications for freedom of religion, equality, non-discrimination and the rights of the child. Students should not be compelled to receive instruction contrary to their own faith, and they should not learn in an environment where their community is ignored, stereotyped or treated as peripheral to the nation.

11. TABLES AND GRAPHS

The following graphs reproduce the comparative data shown in the source report, ‘What Are We Teaching in School?’, focusing on the content of school textbooks developed under the Single National Curriculum of Pakistan, launched in August 2021.³³ A snapshot is given of

²⁶ Abdul Hameed Nayyar, Anjum James Paul and Baela Raza Jamil et al. (n 1), 114, 123, 127, 180.

²⁷ Abdul Hameed Nayyar, Anjum James Paul and Baela Raza Jamil et al. (n 1), 111.

²⁸ Abdul Hameed Nayyar, Anjum James Paul and Baela Raza Jamil et al. (n 1), 110, 111.

²⁹ Abdul Hameed Nayyar, Anjum James Paul and Baela Raza Jamil et al. (n 1), 144.

³⁰ Abdul Hameed Nayyar, Anjum James Paul and Baela Raza Jamil et al. (n 1), 110.

³¹ Abdul Hameed Nayyar, Anjum James Paul and Baela Raza Jamil et al. (n 1), 157, 159.

³² Abdul Hameed Nayyar, Anjum James Paul and Baela Raza Jamil et al. (n 1), 157, 159, 161.

³³ Faaria Khan, Shuneel Malik and Shafaq Minhas et al (n 2).

the content of textbooks published by federal and provincial boards, covering books published from 2021 to 2024. The figures compare the percentages of inclusive content, related to acknowledgement, acceptance of religious diversity and promotion of peace, to majority religious content, across various subjects and regions in Pakistan.

Content of published textbooks

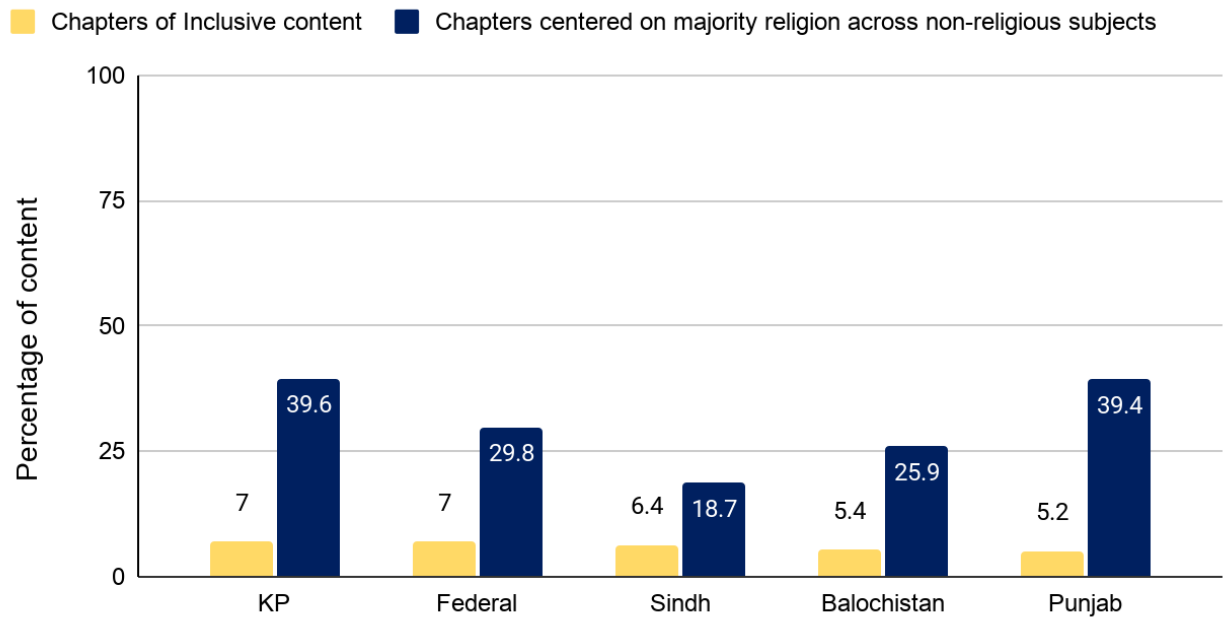


Figure 11.A - The content of textbooks, Grades 1-10, published by federal and provincial boards in Pakistan, since the updating of the Single National Curriculum of Pakistan in August 2021.³⁴

³⁴ Faaria Khan, Shuneel Malik and Shafaq Minhas et al (n 2), 8-9.

Religious content across different subjects

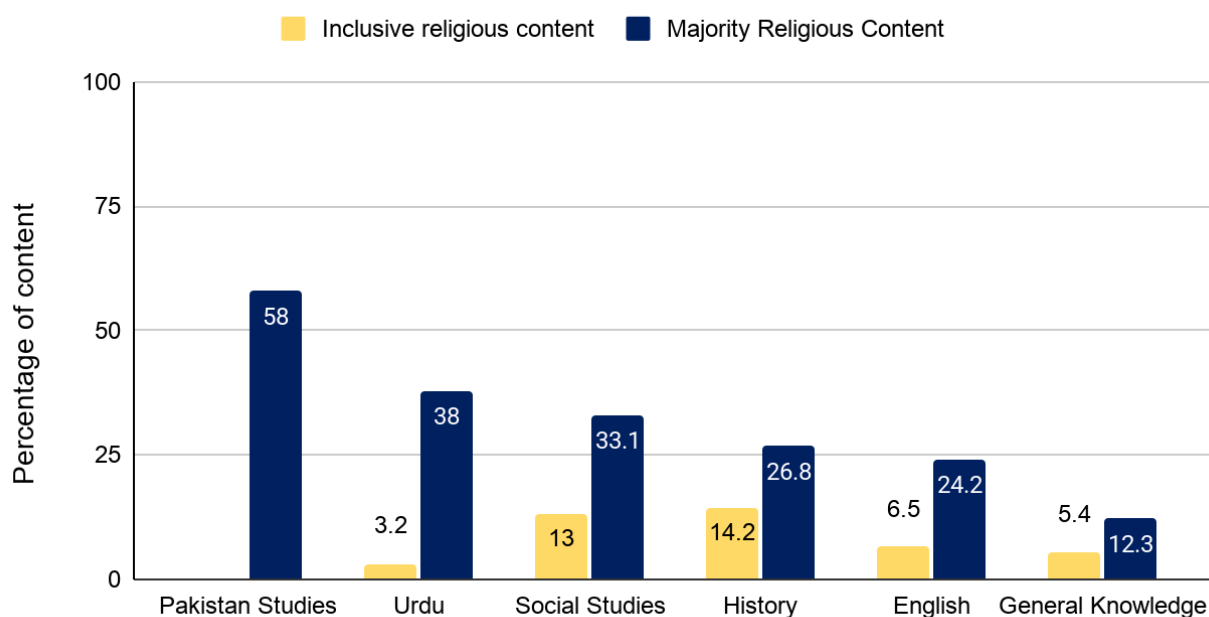


Figure 11.B - Religious content across different subjects' textbooks, Grades 1-10, published by federal and provincial boards in Pakistan, since the updating of the Single National Curriculum of Pakistan in August 2021. Data was not available for inclusive religious content for Pakistan Studies.³⁵

Table: Nature of Content in Textbooks

Education Board	Chapters Containing Religious Content	Chapters Containing Pictures and Graphics of Majority Religion	Chapters Containing Hate Content	Chapters Containing Religiously Inclusive Content
KP	39.6 per cent	14.6 per cent	0 per cent	7.0 per cent
Punjab	39.4 per cent	16.7 per cent	14 per cent	5.2 percent
National Book Foundation (Federal)	29.8 per cent	15.8 per cent	5.0 per cent	7.0 per cent
Balochistan	25.9 per cent	12.9 per cent	0 per cent	5.4 percent
Sindh	18.7 per cent	9.4 per cent	0.7 per cent	6.4 percent

Table 11.C - Nature of Content by Textbook Board in Pakistan published by federal and provincial boards, Grades 1-10, since the updating of the Single National Curriculum of Pakistan in August 2021.³⁶

³⁵ Faaria Khan, Shuneel Malik and Shafaq Minhas et al (n 2), 8,10.

³⁶ Faaria Khan, Shuneel Malik and Shafaq Minhas et al (n 2), 19.

The following chart is an analytical overview developed for this GHRD report. It is not a direct statistical measurement from the source study; it summarises the relative severity of recurring themes identified during the policy analysis.

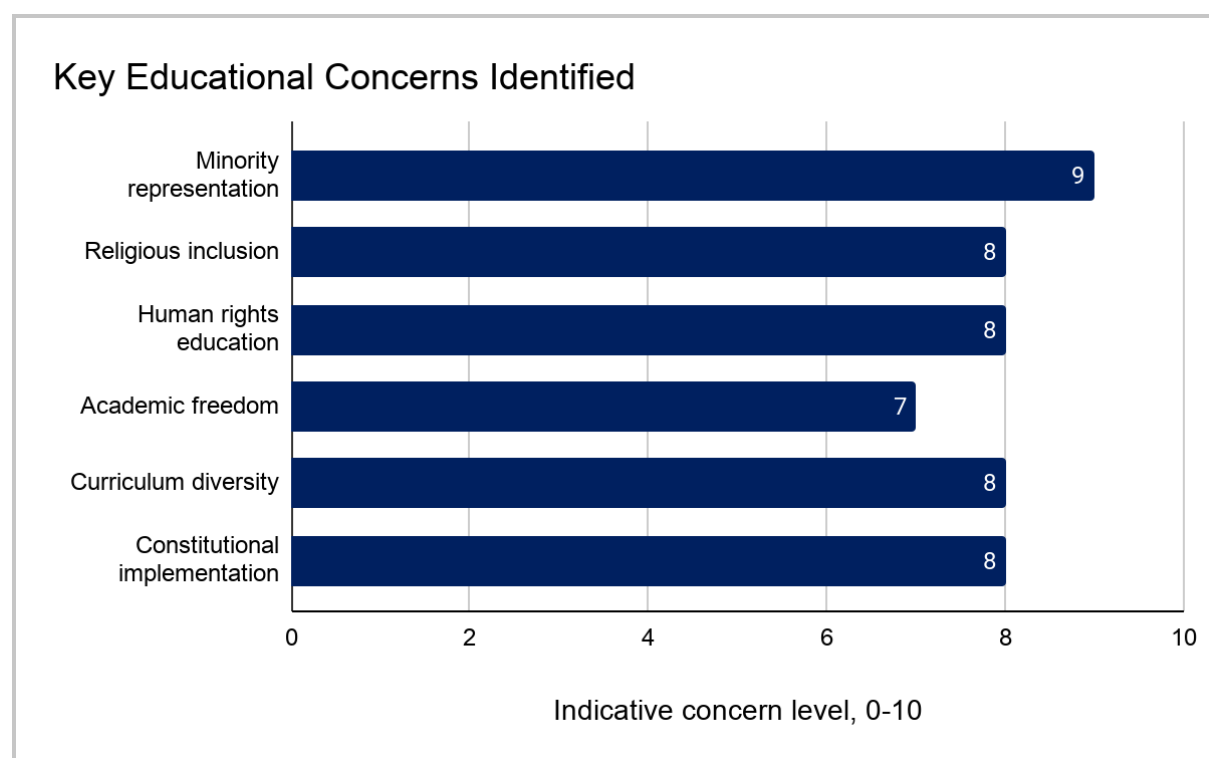


Figure 11.D - Key educational concerns identified. Analytical summary prepared by GHRD.

12. FINDINGS

- 01** Pakistan has constitutional foundations for inclusive education, but implementation remains inconsistent.
- 02** Education policy has historically linked citizenship and national identity with a dominant religious narrative.
- 03** Religious minorities remain insufficiently visible in key educational narratives.
- 04** Compulsory or integrated religious content raises concerns for non-Muslim students.
- 05** Human rights education, peace education and critical thinking require stronger institutional support.

13. RECOMMENDATIONS

13.1. Recommendations to Pakistan

Recommendations to Pakistan.

1. Establish an independent national curriculum review commission with minority representation.
2. Remove discriminatory, stereotypical or exclusionary content from textbooks.
3. Ensure full compliance with Article 22 of the Constitution.
4. Introduce human rights education from primary to secondary levels.
5. Introduce peace education and interfaith understanding modules.
6. Develop alternative religious education pathways for minority students.
7. Include contributions of minority citizens in history, civics and social studies curricula.
8. Strengthen teacher training on diversity, equality and non-discrimination.
9. Create complaint mechanisms for discrimination in schools.
10. Protect academic freedom and promote critical thinking.

13.2. Recommendations to UNESCO

Recommendations to UNESCO.

1. Conduct an independent assessment of curriculum inclusivity.
2. Support textbook modernisation and diversity-sensitive content development.
3. Assist Pakistan in implementing SDG 4 targets related to inclusion and equity.
4. Provide technical support for teacher training in human rights education.
5. Monitor progress on curriculum reform through periodic reporting.

13.3. Recommendations to United Nations Human Rights Council

Recommendations to United Nations Human Rights Council.

1. Raise educational discrimination during Pakistan's Universal Periodic Review.
2. Encourage Pakistan to report on curriculum reform and minority inclusion.
3. Invite relevant Special Rapporteurs to examine education, freedom of religion and minority rights.
4. Encourage treaty bodies to assess the impact of education on minority children.
5. Support international cooperation for inclusive and rights-based education reform.

13.4. Recommendations to the European Commission

Recommendations to European Commission.

1. Include educational inclusion in EU-Pakistan human rights dialogues.

2. Support educational reform projects through cooperation instruments.
3. Encourage curriculum modernisation and independent monitoring.
4. Integrate education indicators into broader human rights assessments.
5. Coordinate with UNESCO and UN mechanisms on inclusive education reform.

14. FIVE YEAR REFORM ROADMAP

Year	Priority action
Year 1	Create a review commission; launch a textbook audit; engage UNESCO.
Year 2	Develop inclusive curriculum framework; start teacher training.
Year 3	Implement revised textbooks; establish complaint mechanisms.
Year 4	Publish national inclusion indicators; conduct independent review.
Year 5	Complete compliance review; submit progress report to UN and UNESCO.

15. CONCLUSION

Pakistan possesses the constitutional foundations necessary to build an inclusive education system. The challenge is implementation. Every child should learn in an environment that

respects dignity, equality, freedom and diversity. Educational reform is therefore not only an educational priority; it is a human rights obligation and a matter of equal citizenship.

LEGISLATION

Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan (1973).

UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (adopted 14 December 1960, entered into force 22 May 1962) 429 UNTS 93.

Convention on the Rights of the Child (adopted 20 November 1989, entered into force 2 September 1990) 1577 UNTS 3.

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (adopted 16 December 1966, entered into force 23 March 1976) 999 UNTS 171.

UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief (adopted 25 November 1981) UNGA Res 36/55.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (adopted 10 December 1948) UNGA Res 217 A(III).

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Khan F, Malik S and Minhas S et al., *What Are We Teaching at School?: A Content Review of School Textbooks Published by Federal and Provincial Textbook Board in Pakistan* (Center for Social Justice, February 2025).

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United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, ‘International Standards: Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief’ (*United Nations*) <<https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-religion-or-belief/international-standards>> accessed 29 June 2026.