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Spreading tolerance: 'Bhatti's sacrifice not in vain'



SOLIDARITY: Tahira Abdullah, Nageen Hayat, Shehryar Taseer and others at the vigil that took place near Super Market on Friday. PHOTO: THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE

Candlelight vigil held to mark the first death anniversary of Shahbaz Bhatti

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An intimate gathering of about a hundred assembled for a candlelight vigil near Super Market in F-6 on Friday to mark the first death anniversary of the former minorities' minister Shahbaz Bhatti. While some were disheartened by the relatively low turnout, Haris Khaleeq pointed out that it's not that individuals are not against brutal assassinations of those who speak against repression, but that few people have the courage to participate in such demonstrations.

Bhatti, who held the port-

folio of Federal Minister for Minorities, was shot dead in broad daylight in the sector of I-8. He was killed within two months Governor Punjab Salman Taseer's assassination.

All the participants chanted slogans to show their unfaltering support for combating intolerance.

Christian representative Basharat Masih said, "We shouldn't be disheartened by small numbers and should still strive to break the culture of silence and show our strength in character and resolve."

In addition to Bhatti, demonstrators remembered others who were killed while trying to mold a more liberal Pakistan, including Benazir Bhutto and Salman Taseer. The latter's son, Shehryar

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PPP member **Captain Wasif**

Taseer, surprised participants with his unexpected presence at the vigil and stressed on the importance of tolerance in a short address.

Paying tribute to Bhatti, Naeem Mirza, of Aurat Foundation, said, "Sometimes great men are forgotten in history, but the values of these men will live on for generations to come and will inspire others to speak."

PPP member Captain Wasif went on to elevate

unity within Pakistan and said, "Shahbaz Bhatti was not a Hindu, a Muslim or a Christian. He was a human being, and he was a Pakistani." Following this address, rights activist Tahira Abdullah led chants calling for the arrest of Bhatti's killers.

Comparing the bravery of Taseer and Bhatti to Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Father Rehmat Hakim of Our Lady of Fatima Church, F-8/4 said, "They were well aware of the repercussions of speaking against the blasphemy laws, which makes their actions even nobler."

He added, "We need to get out the minority-majority rut. I never think of myself as a minority, but as a citizen who has rights and responsibilities, and as long as one

fulfills their responsibilities, they are entitled to their rights."

While talking to *The Express Tribune*, Tariq Khoso, a 23-year-old accounting student, said, "We need to break out of this cage of intolerance and practice an ideology of humanism and the only way to achieve that is through literacy and education."

The event ended with Tahira Abdullah extending an open invitation for Shahbaz Bhatti's first death anniversary at 2 pm on March 6 at the Convention Centre.

The vigil was organised by civil society members, Insani Huqooq Ittehad members, Workers Party Pakistan, Labour Party, Awami Party, Communist Mazdoor Kissan Party and the National Students Federation.