News
Religious Life

Sr. Mariam Gill receives an award from Pakistan's federal minister for poverty alleviation and social safety, Syed Imran Ahmed Shah, on Oct. 14, 2026, in Islamabad. (Courtesy of Christopher Sharaf)

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Two Catholic sisters in Pakistan have received the Dukhtaran-e-Pakistan Excellence Award for their work in healthcare, disability support and women's empowerment, becoming the first women religious to receive the national honor, according to organizers.

Sr. Mariam Gill of the Sisters of Charity of St. Jeanne Antide Thouret, director of St. Joseph's Hospice in Rawalpindi, and Sr. Genevieve Ram Lal of the Sisters of Charity of Jesus and Mary, national director of the Catholic Women's Organization and a member of the National Commission on the Status of Women, received the award on Oct. 14 in Islamabad.

Syed Imran Ahmed Shah, the federal minister for poverty alleviation and social safety, presented the awards to the two sisters and 40 other recipients at a ceremony held alongside the International Conference on Inclusive and Resilient Economic Empowerment and Growth. About 400 participants from 12 countries attended the event.

The awards recognize women's contributions to social, economic and institutional development across five categories: civil society and social development, political leadership, public administration, academia, and sports, according to Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund, the main organizers.

Christopher Sharaf, the national coordinator of Saiban-e-Pakistan, a state initiative for peace, reconciliation and reconstruction studies, nominated the sisters.

Sr. Genevieve Ram Lal receives an award from Pakistan's federal minister for poverty alleviation and social safety, Syed Imran Ahmed Shah, on Oct. 14, 2026, in Islamabad. (Courtesy of Christopher Sharaf)

He told Global Sisters Report that Hyderabad Bishop Samson Shukardin, president of the Pakistan Catholic Bishops' Conference, had approved their nominations.

"Sr. Gill is recognized for her dedicated service to healthcare, disability support, human dignity, and the inclusion of vulnerable communities, while Sr. Lal is recognized for her outstanding contributions to women's empowerment, social welfare, and community development," Sharaf said.

Sharaf, who is Catholic, said the recognition also highlights the contributions of women religious beyond their traditional roles in convents and church-run institutions.

"Through their distinguished service, both awardees have demonstrated exemplary commitment to nation-building, public service and community empowerment," he

said.

He added that he anticipated greater collaboration between the state, Catholic Church commissions, lay Catholics, and institutions from other Christian denominations in areas including healthcare, education and community development.

Gill dedicated her award to her religious congregation, which she said had supported her work with people with disabilities for nearly three decades.

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"Credit goes to the Sisters of Charity of St. Jeanne Antide for my recognition as a member of the congregation," said Gill, 46, who has spent 27 years working in healthcare for people with disabilities.

At St. Joseph's Hospice, she oversees care for 25 residents who rely on assistance with daily activities. Many come from middle-class families, she said, and their needs can become difficult for relatives to manage without sustained support.

Funding remains one of the biggest challenges in sustaining the hospice's work, Gill said. But financial constraints are not the only obstacle facing people with disabilities.

Social stigma and rejection by families can leave people isolated, particularly when they require assistance with basic needs, including eating, taking medication and using the toilet.

"Acceptance is another challenge for such people, who are rejected by both society and their families," she said, describing how some residents are left without adequate support when relatives attend social gatherings or other events.

Gill said changing social attitudes is essential to improving the lives of people with disabilities and those who require long-term care.

"The award is a recognition not only of my personal commitment but also of my identity as a Christian and a woman religious serving vulnerable people."

Both congregations began their missions in Lahore, capital of Punjab province.