

Table of Contents

- ***Pakistani Christian couple 'still alive' when thrown into kiln - coroner***
- ***Three more cases in which Pakistani Christians accused of Blasphemy***
- ***EU urges Pakistan to push for repeal of blasphemy laws***
- ***Pakistan TV mogul gets 26 years' jail for blasphemy***
- ***Top activist hopeful for blasphemy changes***
- ***Pakistani Christian woman sentenced to death for blasphemy files appeal***
- ***Death penalty for Pakistan woman turned on technicality***
- ***Pakistan Christian couple burned in kiln over debt, not blasphemy***
- ***Gujrat policeman kills man in custody alleging blasphemy***
- ***UK to deport Pakistani activist despite Taliban death threats***
- ***Pakistani Christian couple brutally killed by mob for alleged 'blasphemy'***
- ***Family pleads for Mohammad Asghar, Briton on blasphemy charge in Pakistan***
- ***A Pakistani scholar accused of Blasphemy is shot dead***
- ***Blasphemy laws: legislation and history***
- ***Pakistani Police charge Christians under blasphemy charges***
- ***Atheist Ex-Muslims Sher Shah Jogzei, Syed Muhammad Tabish and Muhammad Shamoon must be granted asylum by Home Office***
- ***Mob kills 3 Ahmadis – a woman, a young girl, & a baby***
- ***Minorities hoodwinked yet again***
- ***A converted Ahmadi and his family under constant threat from religious extremists***
- ***Pakistani Muslim NGO highlights forced conversion of Christian women***
- ***Pakistani blasphemy law used against popular TV channel, Jehovah's Witnesses and more***
- ***Accused of blasphemy, man killed in police station***
- ***Offence against any religion comes under blasphemy law***
- ***Pakistan's Hindus, other minorities face surge of violence***
- ***Briton jailed in Pakistan for 'posing as Muslim' tells of ordeal***
- ***Ahmadi newspaper case: Four Ahmadis asked to record statements***
- ***Pakistani couple get death sentences for blasphemy***
- ***Pakistani Christian sentenced to death for blasphemy***
- ***Pakistani university refuses prosperous work to Christians***
- ***Church of Pakistan college Principal beaten, told to leave***
- ***Pakistan poised to make death penalty compulsory for 'blasphemy'***
- ***Blasphemy law used against minorities in Pakistan***

- ***Blasphemy case: Briton in Pakistan sentenced to death***
 - ***A pending matter***
 - ***Islamic scholars in Pakistan push for hate speech ban***
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Pakistani Christian couple 'still alive' when thrown into kiln - coroner

World Watch Monitor (23.12.2014) - A lawyer for the state of Punjab, Pakistan has described the murder of a Christian couple by a mob of at least 500 to 600 as "brutal and barbaric". The post-mortem report on their twin deaths (first revealed in the Supreme Court on Dec 15) showed that both husband and wife were still alive when they were thrown into the brick kiln where they both worked, and that they burnt to death.

Shazad Masih and his wife Shama Bibi, who was five months pregnant, were tortured by an enraged mob over a false accusation of burning pages of the Qur'an; they were then burned to death on [November 4](#). They were bonded labourers at the brick kiln, which meant that they were unable to leave their home after trouble first erupted, due to heavy debt.

After their deaths, the police arrested more than 50 people and charged them under Pakistan's Anti-Terrorism Act: ("Terrorism" means "the use or threat of action where The use or threat is designed to coerce and intimidate or overawe the Government or the public or a section of the public or community or sect or create a sense of fear or insecurity in society.")

Eleven of them on Wed 17th Dec applied for bail, but the prosecutor said they did not deserve any leniency, and Anti-Terrorism Court judge Haroon Latif Khan refused them all. They were named as Muhammad Akram, Abdul Latif, Allah Rakha, Nisar Akhtar, Muhammad Hanif, Tajamul Hussain, Amanat Ali, Usman Sindhu, Arsalan Attique, Haris Bashir and Waqas Bashir.

The last four were represented by Supreme Court lawyer Chaudhry Muhammad Arif Sindhu and Dr. Rana Muhammad Shamim (a retired justice of Sindh High Court and ex-Advocate-General and Prosecutor-General of Sindh province), who argued that the last two were only eyewitnesses.

Lawyer Sindhu told World Watch Monitor that the police had arrested Haris Bashir and his brother Usman Bashir because they were eyewitnesses to the negligence of the police, which had allowed the couple to die at the hands of the mob. The lawyer said that Haris Bashir, a university student, had informed the police as a law-abiding citizen.

"Usman Bashir, a Lahore High Court lawyer, went to the police station after Haris called him but the police also arrested him and named him in the case."

Other lawyers came to the defence of their colleague.

"A group of more than 100 lawyers, headed by the Kasur Bar Association President, met with the Kasur district police officer. But he refused [to release Usman Bashir] saying there was pressure from high officials" said Arif Sindhu.

The state itself is the complainant in this case; meaning it's taken responsibility for ensuring that the perpetrators do not get out of a court case by compromise with, or

harassment of, Christians. However, the ATC has also allowed relatives of Shahzad and Shama to have legal representation. The Voice Society, an NGO, represented Shama's father Mukhtar Masih in court via Riaz Anjum and Tahir Gul. These lawyers argued that the police investigation found Haris Bashir guilty of incitement through hate speech from the mosque loudspeaker, and that he rang the police after inciting the mob, well-aware that he could be at risk of arrest in connection with what might happen next.

The Voice Society Executive Director Aneeqa Maria said the court had rightly rejected all bail applications. "In an earlier incident of arson at [Joseph Colony](#), a Christian area, all suspects were released on bail. This gave the impression that the executive hadn't provided sufficient incriminating evidence, and that the government was not interested in punishing those responsible for that barbaric act of violence against Christians," she said.

Earlier, on November 22, the Supreme Court of Pakistan took an initiative of its own (known in Pakistan as a [suo motu notice](#)) and ordered the Punjab province government to [submit a report on](#) the incident.

The police submitted this report on Monday 15th Dec before a three-member SC bench, headed by the Chief Justice of Pakistan Nasirul Mulk.

Five policemen were close by when the couple was being tortured and later burned to death. Mulk said that they could ["have resorted to aerial fire to disperse the crowd, to save the Christian couple."](#)

The bench said that the police investigation was incomplete and [sought a more comprehensive](#) report. It also ordered the police to take disciplinary action against the five officers.

The police informed the court that three clerics – Mohammad Hussain, Noorul Hassan and Arshad Baloch – had been accused of inciting people through hate speech from the mosque loudspeakers, but only Mohammad Hussain had been arrested.

The police report did, however, disclose the fact that ["the post-mortem report also reveals that the cause of death of both the victims is burning with dry heat."](#)

Human rights activist Napoleon Qayyum said that this is the first time he has seen the government being serious about bringing the culprits to justice in the case of minorities.

"In the past tribunals, inquiries, *suo motu* notices etc. were just meant to appease; no one was ever punished."

"After the mob attack in 2009 on two Christian colonies in Gojra in which at least seven Christians died, the government set up a tribunal led by Justice Iqbal Hameed."

["Justice Iqbal's report was not made public until last year](#), let alone implementing its recommendations. The justice sought amendment in the blasphemy laws, disciplinary action against the police concerned, establishment of religious disputes' Resolution Boards and a more efficient information system among intelligence agencies. But nothing has been done on these lines."

"Deterrence against religious extremism will improve only if vigilante justice is discouraged - by bringing instigators to justice, and not by mere notices and inquiries."

Three more cases in which Pakistani Christians accused of Blasphemy

WWM (13.12.2014) - Three more cases of blasphemy accusations have emerged in Pakistan, even after a Christian couple's beating to death and burning in a brick kiln after allegations of blasphemy horrified the world, including the metropolitan elite in the country.

The Christian couple were killed over suspicions of desecrating the Qur'an on November 4. The Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif expressed the resolve to bring the perpetrators "[to justice](#)" and appointed Senator [Kamran Michael to be the focal person in the case](#).

Condemnation from top religious clerics gave some hope to [human rights defenders](#) for some positive change. The Pakistani police arrested [dozens of suspects](#) in connection with the lynching of the couple but all these measures have failed to curb the rising levels of discrimination against Christians.

London-based Minority Rights Group International in its new report published yesterday (Dec. 8th) *Searching for Security: The Rising Marginalization of Religious Communities in Pakistan* confirms this trend:

"The environment in which minorities find themselves is characterized by hate speech, frequent invocation of blasphemy laws and increasingly violent attacks on places of worship."

It was in this hostile environment that only four days after the Christian couple was beaten and burned to death, 24 bonded-labourer Christian families, also working at a brick kiln, narrowly escaped a mob attack, only due to the intervention of a police contingent which happened to be passing through the village.

World Watch Monitor visited the brick kiln the next day and interviewed a number of people involved to piece together this account of events:

A copy of the Qur'an was recovered from a water channel in Pajian (Bus) Stop, Raiwind, on November 9. The Qur'an was handed to cleric Muhammad Hussein who runs a mosque in the nearby village. After this, an announcement was made from the mosque that desecration of the Qur'an had taken place.

In the absence of any obvious suspect, nearby Christians were rumoured by locals to be the ones who could have done this crime. As a mob began pouring in after the announcement, some extremist Muslims pressed these Christian bonded workers to declare on oath that they hadn't done this act "or else the Kasur episode could be repeated."

The Christians immediately informed the brick kiln owner, Hajji Ikram, about this demand and the rising level of anger among the protestors. Hajji told World Watch Monitor he found it very impractical to bring all his Christian workers out and make them take an oath. "I discussed with my son Muhammad Tayyab -what if the enraged mob were still unsatisfied, and the Kasur incident be repeated at our kiln."

"Fearing any untoward situation, I told the Christians to immediately inform the police about the threat that neighboring Muslims have posed to them."

It did not take long for the police to arrive and take control of the mob. Some of the Christians in the village told World Watch Monitor that about nine vehicles loaded with more than 100 policemen immediately arrived to protect the Christians, and remained deployed there for a couple of days.

Talking to World Watch Monitor, Saddar Superintendent of Police Ejaz Shafi Dogar said that on that day most of the police had been deployed at the annual gathering of the [Tablighi Jamaat](#) (an Islamic religious movement that aims at spiritual revival), which is only a few kilometres away from the village. "The program had ended and we were near the village when the emergency call from the Christians was received," said Dogar.

"The police immediately took charge of the situation and resolved the matter peacefully. This all became possible because of the ready availability of the police; otherwise, things could have got worse," Dogar said.

"The method prescribed in Islam for discarding a worn out copy of the Qur'an is burying it but many illiterate Muslims, though wrongly, believe that the worn out Qur'an should be drowned in clean running water," Dogar said.

It is in this context that, out of reverence, someone threw a copy of the Qur'an into the canal from which a water channel comes to this village and ends near the brick kiln where Christian families worked."

"The condition of the Qur'an was so deteriorated that it was later easy to convince the area Muslims that it had drifted all the way from the canal into the channel."

Dogar says that there is no more danger for the Christian families working on the kiln.

Nine Christians accused in burning of Qur'an pages

About 300 kilometres north of Lahore, nine Christians living in the capital have been named in a police First Information Report (FIR) only because their names were found on a list attached to the partially burned pages of the Qur'an.

Naheed Ahmed, who runs a tea stall in Islamabad, lodged a formal complaint [no. 596/14] with the Industrial Area Police Station that on November 20 he found partially burned pages of the Qur'an when he was returning from the mosque after saying the early morning prayer.

"I found [partially] burned pages of the Qur'an at the gate of Radio Pakistan. When I looked around, I found similar pages on both sides of the road, in front of the HBL Bank. I picked up all these pages and preserved them with utmost respect. Along with each burned Qur'anic page, another page was attached which had a list of names."

The Station House Officer (SHO) Fiaz Khan Shinwari told World Watch Monitor that no arrest had been made so far and an investigation is underway. "I am working hard to expose the actual perpetrators behind this crime. So no arrest will be made until we reach the actual criminals."

One of the persons nominated in the FIR is Pastor Arif Masih who told World Watch Monitor that he had no link with the burning of the pages of the Qur'an. "I don't know who has done this heinous act, but I am sure that the perpetrator is very much against the Christian community."

Human rights activist Basharat Khokhar told World Watch Monitor that the names of the nine people given in the list are of Christians living in a nearby slum area in Sector H-9. "The area police were assured that these Christians would not flee and if anyone is found guilty they would be handed in to the police."

"After this assurance, the police are investigating without arresting these Christians."

Sectarian clash gets a Christian man accused of blasphemy

About 200 kilometers from Islamabad, a 70-year-old Christian man was caught between two rival Sunni sects in Sargodha, when he painted a signboard fixed outside a mosque.

Bashir Masih was hired to whitewash the walls of a mosque, including an iron signboard that had sacred Islamic words written on it.

Masih is the only breadwinner of the family and earns a wage of about 300 rupees (roughly \$3) a day by whitewashing. On October 1, he was hired to whitewash the walls of Jamiya Mosque, Zill-e-Nabi and to paint the signboard fixed outside it. While Masih was doing his work, several people gathered and beat him for doing this. They handed him to the police claiming that he had committed blasphemy against Islam by applying paint on the board that had sacred words written on it. According to the FIR [no. 442/14] lodged by Muhammad Arshad, one of the caretakers of the mosque:

The mosque was constructed 18 years ago and is under the control of the Sunni Barelvi sect. Today ... a man, whose name not yet known, holding a brush and paint, has removed the sacred words (by painting) from the iron signboard of the mosque.

Arshad further stated that the men who had sent Masih had instructed him to write the "names of the people belong to his sect". Arshad submitted that when he inquired about the incident from the people who had hired Masih, "they confirmed this fact, and also threatened to kill each one of us (ie. a different Sunni sect) if we tried to stop them in future."

The Minorities' Alliance of Pakistan Chairman Tahir Naveed Chaudhry told World Watch Monitor that Masih was rescued with the efforts of the local Christians. "The police and the complainant party were assured that Masih had no role in the sectarian clash, and that he would be available whenever the police needed him for investigation."

"We are trying to resolve this case without any further litigation, so that Masih is saved from further social and economic fallout after being accused of blasphemy."

According to the data quoted by the [Human Rights Without Frontiers International](#), about [4000 blasphemy cases have been registered since these laws were enacted in 1980s](#). Out of these, 49% are against Muslims, 26% against Ahmadis (an offshoot of Islam now constitutionally declared non-Muslim in Pakistan), 21 % against Christians and 4 % against others.

According to the [Centre for Research and Security Studies](#), at least 54 people have been murdered in Pakistan in extrajudicial killings since 1990: 25 were Muslims, 17 were Christian, 5 were Ahmadis, 1 Hindu, 1 Buddhist and 5 without their faith identified.

Since they account for only 1.6 percent of the total population, the vulnerability of Christians is shown by their high representation in these quoted figures. The Minority Rights Group International report also notes:

"Since 2001, violence and discrimination against Christians has increased. Seen as connected to the 'West' due to their faith, Christians have at times been scapegoated for the US-led invasion of Afghanistan, as well as the immense human suffering seen as a consequence of interventions in other countries with large Muslim populations".

Reasons for Christians' high representation in the data also include poverty, lack of social or political strength, illiteracy, and the stereotypical perception among Muslims that Christians in general are against the country and their religion.

EU urges Pakistan to push for repeal of blasphemy laws

AFP (27.11.2014) - The European parliament called Thursday on Pakistan to overhaul its blasphemy laws with a view to repealing them, saying they were "increasingly used to target" Christians and other minorities.

The parliament expressed particular concern about the case of Asia Bibi, a Pakistani Christian woman sentenced to death four years ago for insulting the prophet Mohammed during an argument with a Muslim woman over a bowl of water.

Her sentence was upheld last month by a high court in the eastern Pakistani city of Lahore, dashing hopes the conviction might be overturned or commuted to a jail term.

In a non-binding resolution, members of the European parliament in Strasbourg, France expressed their concern that blasphemy laws "are increasingly used to target vulnerable minority groups, including Ahmedis and Christians, in Pakistan."

The resolution "calls on the government of Pakistan to carry out a thorough review of the blasphemy laws and their current application ... with a view to repealing the laws."

It also "calls on the government of Pakistan to abolish the death penalty, including for blasphemy or apostasy."

Around 50 MEP's meanwhile wrote to EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini urging her to ask Pakistan to show clemency toward Asia Bibi.

In a final recourse in her case, Bibi filed an appeal in Pakistan's top court Monday.

Blasphemy is a hugely sensitive issue in the majority Muslim country, with even unproven allegations often prompting mob violence.

Pakistan has never executed anyone for blasphemy and has had a de-facto moratorium on civilian executions since 2008.

But anyone convicted, or even just accused, of insulting Islam, risks a violent and bloody death at the hands of vigilantes.

Pakistan TV mogul gets 26 years' jail for blasphemy

(26.11.2014) Reuters - Pakistan's largest media group said on Wednesday it will appeal against a 26-year jail term for its owner for blasphemy, the latest twist in a long-running feud between the station and the military.

A court sentenced Mir Shakeel-ur-Rehman, owner of Geo News, on Tuesday over a broadcast showing people dancing to a song about the wedding of the Islamic Prophet Muhammad's daughter.

The channel faced a slew of blasphemy complaints about the show, provoking accusations that the country's punitive blasphemy law was being used to silence critics of the military.

The charges were brought soon after the station publicly blamed the shooting of one of their top journalists on the military's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) spy agency. The army denied the accusations.

"The malicious acts of the proclaimed offenders ignited the sentiments of all the Muslims in the country ... which cannot be taken lightly and there is need to strictly curb such tendency," an anti-terror court in the city of Gilgit said in its verdict.

The channel's owner, the host of the morning show and two guests were ordered to pay fines of \$16,600, surrender their passports and sell their properties.

The order is unlikely to be implemented because verdicts by courts in the northern Gilgit-Baltistan region do not apply to the rest of Pakistan.

The News, a daily newspaper owned by ur-Rehman, announced on its front page on Wednesday that it would appeal to the Supreme Court against both the verdict and sentence.

Pakistani media has become increasingly free and vocal in recent years but public criticism of the army or the ISI is still largely taboo.

The standoff between Geo and the army exposed divisions between Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, who supported the channel, and the army, which has ruled the country for more than half of its history.

In June, the state media regulator shut Geo News for 15 days and imposed a \$101,500 fine. The channel also publicly apologized for reporting against the ISI.

Pakistan's blasphemy law allows anyone to file a complaint alleging their religious feelings have been hurt for any reason. The punishment for blasphemy is death.

Rights groups say the law is increasingly being used to settle personal scores. This year has seen a record number of blasphemy cases and increasing violence against the accused.

Top activist hopeful for blasphemy changes

Persecuted Church (25.11.2014) - Condemnations by Pakistan's top clerics and Islamist parties against the misuse of blasphemy laws could help reverse a rising tide of mob killings, according to one of the country's leading rights activists.

A Christian couple accused of desecrating a Qur'an were beaten to death by a mob of 1,500 and their bodies thrown in a furnace this month in the latest in a spate of lynchings in conservative Pakistan.

A day later, a policeman hacked a man who had been accused of blasphemy to death with an axe while he was in custody.

Pakistan's tough blasphemy laws can include the death penalty for insulting the prophet Mohammed, but critics say they are often used to settle personal disputes.

While there have been no civilian executions for any crime since 2008, anyone convicted, or even accused, of insulting Islam risks a bloody death at the hands of vigilantes.

Such incidents have been met with general condemnation in the past, but little action has been taken against either the perpetrators or instigators — a factor, say activists, driving a rise in such crimes.

But for lawyer Asma Jahangir, recently given France's highest civilian award and Sweden's alternative to the Nobel prize for her decades of rights work, the response to the Christian couple's killing offers hope for change.

"There is a positive development, that religious scholars and parties including Jamaat-e-Islami went there and came forward against the incident, which is a good omen," she said at her offices in the eastern city of Lahore.

"I think it is a very big change and we should appreciate and welcome it."

Pakistan's religious right has for decades used supposed threats to Islam to stoke up support in a country where 97 percent of the population are Muslims.

But Jahangir said the mounting number of gruesome vigilante cases was now forcing even those who had traditionally been the law's most vocal supporters to pause.

The All Pakistan Ulema Council, a leading clerical body, has chastised the government for failing to act and pledged that in the case of the Christian couple, justice for the victims must be served.

It may sound like wishful thinking, but few Pakistani rights activists have achieved the credibility of Jahangir, a lawyer and daughter of a left-wing politician.

The former UN special rapporteur on religion has braved death threats, beatings and prison time to win landmark human rights cases and stand up to dictatorship.

Pakistan still suffers terrible violence against women, discrimination against minorities and near-slavery for bonded laborers, but Jahangir insists human rights causes have made greater strides than it may appear.

"There was a time that human rights was not even an issue in this country. Then prisoners' rights became an issue," she said.

"Women's rights was thought of as a Western concept. Now people do talk about women's rights — political parties talk about it, even religious parties talk about it."

Military undermining democracy?

Jahangir can count a number of victories, from winning freedom for bonded laborers from their "owners" through pioneering litigation to a landmark court case that allowed women to marry of their own volition.

She has also been an outspoken critic of the country's powerful military establishment, including during her stint as the first ever female leader of Pakistan's bar association.

The 62-year-old was arrested in 2007 by the government of then military ruler Pervez Musharraf, and two years ago claimed her life was in danger from the country's feared ISI spy agency.

She recently engaged in a war of words with cricketer-turned-politician Imran Khan, whose anti-government protest movement she says is backed by the military — a claim his party has denied.

Khan's push to unseat Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has lost momentum since peaking in late August, but he plans a mass rally in Islamabad on November 30.

Jahangir said it was clear that Khan and populist cleric Tahir-ul-Qadri, who led a parallel protest, were being aided by the military.

"I have lived in politics, I was born in a political house, it runs in my blood — so I know when certain faces are coming out, where they are coming from," she said.

Pakistani Christian woman sentenced to death for blasphemy files appeal

The Guardian (24.11.2014) <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/nov/24/pakistani-christian-woman-sentenced-death-blasphemy-file-appeal> - Asia Bibi was found guilty of insulting the prophet Muhammad four years ago after incident in June 2009. A Pakistani Christian woman sentenced to death for blasphemy has filed an appeal in the country's top court, her final legal recourse after being found guilty of insulting the prophet Muhammad four years ago.

A high court in Lahore confirmed the death sentence of Asia Bibi last month, dashing hopes the conviction might be quashed or commuted to a jail term. She has been on death row since November 2010 after being convicted of blasphemy during an argument with a Muslim woman over a bowl of water.

"On behalf of Asia Bibi I have today filed an appeal in the supreme court," her lawyer Saiful Malook said on Monday.

Malook said in the petition his client had asked the court to reconsider deficiencies in the case including allegedly manipulated evidence and a delay between the time of the incident and its investigation by police. He added that the blasphemy claim was concocted by Bibi's enemies to target her and had no basis in fact.

"We expect an early hearing of the appeal and hope that the proceedings will be over in one year," Malook said.

The allegations against Bibi date back to June 2009, when she was labouring in a field and a row broke out with some Muslim women she was working with. She was asked to fetch water, but the Muslim women objected, saying that as a non-Muslim she was unfit to touch the water bowl. A few days later the women went to a local cleric and put forward the blasphemy allegations.

Bibi's husband has also written to Pakistan's president, Mamnoon Hussain, to ask for her to be pardoned and allowed to move to France.

"We are convinced that Asia will only be saved from being hanged if the venerable President Hussain grants her a pardon. No one should be killed for drinking a glass of water," Ashiq Masih wrote in an open letter dated 17 November. The mayor of Paris, Anne Hidalgo, has said the couple are welcome in the city.

Blasphemy is a hugely sensitive issue in the majority Muslim country, with even unproven allegations often prompting mob violence. Pakistan has never executed anyone for blasphemy and has had a de facto moratorium on civilian executions since 2008. But anyone convicted, or even just accused, of insulting Islam, risks death at the hands of vigilantes.

http://hrwf.eu/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Pakistan_2014.pdf

Death penalty for Pakistan woman turned on technicality

The Pakistan court that a month ago said Aasiya Noreen, a Christian, must die for the crime of insulting Islam, based its ruling on a legal technicality that it now wants to eliminate.

The Lahore High Court, an appeals court for Pakistan's largest province, had decided Oct. 16 that it would let stand the 2010 conviction of Noreen, a day-labor berry picker whose argument with a Muslim coworker blew up into a highly charged test of the country's anti-blasphemy laws, which are widely criticized abroad but popular among voters in the Muslim-majority nation.

The appeals judges now explain they had no choice, given the way Pakistan's laws are written, and have turned to lawmakers to craft legislation that would empower trial courts to apply a test that would make future blasphemy convictions much more difficult to achieve. That test was not in place when Noreen, popularly known as Aasiya Bibi, was tried.

The High Court's detailed legal reasoning, as well as its intention to close the loophole through which it says Noreen has fallen, is contained in a Nov. 5 written decision that was not available on Oct. 16 when the court ruled from the bench that her original conviction will stand. In Pakistan, blasphemy against Mohammed, the prophet of Islam, carries the requirement of the death penalty, though it has never been carried out.

The written judgment was released the day after a [Pakistani Christian couple was brutally murdered](#) after an alleged blasphemy.

"The bench has referred the case to the executive for consideration after identifying a legal glitch," said Abid Saqi, former President of Lahore High Court Bar Association.

That glitch, he said, involves a legal principle found in Islamic law called *tazkiya al shuhood*. It requires accusers to meet strict standards of Islamic piety, and it came into play when Noreen's lawyer, Naeem Shakir, embarked on an unconventional legal strategy: To attempt to subject his client to Islamic law rather than Pakistan's secular laws.

Pakistan's Federal Shariat Court, which determines whether the country's laws comply with the principles of Islam, declared in 1990 that insulting the prophet qualifies as *hadd* – a category of crimes and punishments prescribed in the Qur'an and the tradition of the Prophet. Accordingly, the only acceptable penalty is death, the Shariat Court ruled.

And that, in turn, requires the strictest standards of evidence, or *tazkiya al shuhood*, Shakir argued to the Lahore High Court in October. He pointed to a 1992 decision by the Pakistan Supreme Court, which ruled that "[w]hat the expression *tazkiya al shuhood* signifies and connotes is to require elaborate enquiry into the piety, uprightness and integrity of the witness from the men of the same virtues."

Those stringent barriers were not used at Noreen's 2010 court trial, rendering the conviction invalid, Shakir argued.

In their written ruling released Nov. 5, High Court judges Muhammad Anwaarul Haq and Syed Shahbaz Ali Rizvi upheld Noreen's conviction and death penalty based largely on a shoddy trial defense that failed to cross-examine prosecution witnesses. Left unchallenged, the prosecution's case prevailed by default, the appeals judges said.

Noreen's trial lawyer, S.K. Chaudhry, who also was present at the appeal hearing, had previously said he dared not speak the allegedly blasphemous remarks to Noreen's accusers in court, lest he be accused of blasphemy himself.

The High Court's ruling brushed aside the 1992 Supreme Court guidance on *tazkiya al shuhood*, saying the accused in that case had been acquitted on the merits of the evidence even without the benefit of the stricter standards, leaving open the question of whether those standards ought to be employed generally.

The ruling was silent on the question of *hadd* in Noreen's case and whether the attendant higher legal barriers to prosecution ought to have been employed. The judges did, however, suggest they could have made a determination if they had been equipped with guidelines for applying the legal test:

"In the absence of any corresponding amendment in procedural law for testing credibility of a witness at such a higher standard, the principle of *Tazkiyah al Shuhood* cannot be applied in other cases," the ruling said. It expressed the "utmost necessity for necessary corresponding amendments in procedural law for the proof of an offence where only sentence provided is death."

The judges ordered that the Ministry of Law, Justice and Human Rights transmit the court's request to the Pakistan government.

If the government complies with the High Court's request – a separate matter entirely -- blasphemy defendants in Pakistan theoretically could place nearly insurmountable barriers in front of accusers. Those barriers might have prevented a Lahore trial court from handing down a death sentence in March to Sawan Masih, accused of insulting the Prophet during a night of drinking and conversation with a Muslim friend in 2013. Two days after their conversation, thousands of Muslims looted and torched Christian homes and churches throughout Lahore's Joseph Colony, displacing hundreds of families.

Drinking liquor is punishable under Islamic law. The *tazkiyah al shuhood* standard, demanding strict adherence to Islamic principles from witnesses, presumably would have disqualified the testimony of Masih's accuser.

Placing the matter in the hands of Pakistan lawmakers opens the possibility of renewed public debate over an extremely sensitive issue for the country. Politicians have been killed for speaking out in favor of reform.

Hafiz Tahir Ashrafi, [a staunch supporter of Pakistan's anti-blasphemy laws](#), nonetheless told World Watch Monitor he views the High Court's request favorably. "In all cases, the evidence must meet the standards prescribed in the Islamic jurisprudence," said Ashrafi, chairman of the Pakistan Ulema Council, a body of Islamic clerics and scholars.

However, Ghulam Mustafa Chaudhry, a lawyer who represented Noreen's accuser, said there's no need to expand the application of *tazkiyah al shuhood*.

"The current anti-blasphemy laws were perfectly fine and there is no need to introduce any procedural amendment in them," Chaudhry told World Watch Monitor.

Chaudhry, president of the Khatme Nabuwat (Finality of Prophethood) Lawyers' Forum, said in death penalty cases, a superintendent of police is appointed to collect evidence. "Junior officers can do hanky-panky but not senior officers of the SP post. So enquiry by them already means a high standard of evidence," he said.

"If one really insists on the *tazkiyah al shuhood* standard of evidence then it shouldn't just apply on witnesses, the [judge] should also be appointed based on the Islamic standards not the way our current judges who are selected by political parties," Chaudhry said. "Even the entire society must operate on Islamic principles rather than just cherry picked laws that suit to the interests of certain people."

Pakistan Christian couple burned in kiln over debt, not blasphemy

ACNS (06.11.2014) - The Church of Pakistan has said a Christian couple beaten and burned in a brick kiln was revenge for unpaid bills, not because they had damaged a Qur'an.

A member of the united church, that comprises several Christian denominations including Anglicans, yesterday sent a message to supporters to clarify media reports about the murders.

The statement, from Raheel Sharoon, development officer of the Diocese of Raiwind, clarified that the crime was motivated by revenge after a disagreement over a debt rather than any blasphemy against Islam on the part of these young parents.

"By this time you might have heard through media about the brutal killing of a Christian couple in Kot Radha Kishan (close to Raiwind) on the pretext of desecration of Holy Quran. This family lived close to Clarkabad, which is a Christian village about 25 km from the city of Raiwind. Today I, along with Bishop Samuel Azariah and some other colleagues visited the family for condolence and to investigate the real facts. So here are our findings:

"On Tuesday, November 04, 2014 at 06:00 a.m. (01:00 a.m. GMT) a mob of 1500-1600 people, from the Muslim Religious Community of nearby villages, gathered near the village of Clarkabad. This mob was gathered on the pretext that a Christian couple belonging to the said village and working as brick kiln workers had allegedly desecrated the pages of Holy Qur'an by burning them in the brick kiln furnace.

"The couple, Shehzad and Shamaa [Bibi], were pulled out of their house. Family of the victims called the police through emergency number, on which five policemen from the local police station arrived and tried to pull away Shehzad and Shamma from the clutches of the crowd. Their efforts went in vain as they were overwhelmed by the mob which snatched away the victims.

"After that, the mob gathered around the brick kiln where Shehzad and Shamaa used to work and where the alleged desecration took place. They tore away the clothes of Shehzad and Shamaa, and paraded them naked around the brick kiln twice before attacking them and beating them to near death. At the time of this happening Shamaa was four months pregnant.

"After thoroughly beating both the victims, they threw them in the furnace of the brick kiln and burned them alive. When the family of the victims went to claim the dead bodies, all they found were few bones.

"The real story is that the owner of brick kiln, Yousaf Gujjar, lent some money to the couple and when he asked for the money to be returned there was a confrontation since

majority of brick kiln workers cannot return their loans in cash but do it by working at the brick kiln. After which he started spreading rumors of desecration of the Holy Qur'an.

"The role of police is of total negligence since all this went on for quite a while and this place is about 25 minute drive from Lahore; while the local media only shared this news as a Christian couple being burned by an angry mob without sharing the pretext of the misuse of religious fervour. As for local Government they only played their role to make sure this story does not reaches the masses and becomes big."

Mr Sharoon also shared links to videos in which the brother of the deceased couple, Iqbal, and their cousin, Javed Shahbaz, sharing the details of the ordeal.

Gujrat policeman kills man in custody alleging blasphemy

Dawn.com (06.11.2014) - A police officer on Wednesday night murdered a detained man with an axe, later alleging that the man had committed blasphemy.

45-year-old Jhang resident Syed Tufail Haider was arrested a day earlier for wounding two people from a locality in Gujrat. According to police authorities, Tufail came to Madina Syedan in Gujrat three days ago to attend a majlis.

During interrogation, Assistant Sub-Inspector (ASI) Faraz Naveed got into a heated argument with Tufail and struck him on the neck with an axe lying in the room, a blow which resulted in immediate death.

He later accused Tufail of making derogatory remarks against companions of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), with other police officials saying the arrested man was mentally unsound.

"Tufail was kept in the lock-up but he continued uttering derogatory remarks and hurled abuse at policemen. He looked like a malang (wandering preacher) and seemed mentally imbalanced," duty officer Ali Raza told AFP.

"Assistant Sub-Inspector Faraz Naveed, 36, became very angry on hearing the derogatory remarks against the companions of the Prophet and he killed the detainee with an axe in the lock up," he added.

Police have arrested ASI Faraz Naveed and taken the axe into custody. The body of the slain man has been sent to a local hospital for a postmortem.

Chief Minister Punjab Shahbaz Sharif has taken notice of Tufail Haider's murder and has ordered a further investigation of the incident.

UK to deport Pakistani activist despite Taliban death threats

The Guardian (14.10.2014) <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/14/uk-deport-pakistani-activist-liaquat-ali-hazara> - Liaquat Ali Hazara, whose deportation is set for 21 October, campaigned for Shia minority group against sectarian violence

Britain plans to deport a prominent Pakistani activist within a week, even though he has received multiple death threats from the country's most brutal sectarian group, and from Taliban militants who know his home address and have been stalking him online.

Liaquat Ali Hazara is a campaigner for a Shia minority group that shares his name, the Hazaras. More than 500 Hazaras have been killed in his home province of Balochistan since 2008, according to a Human Rights Watch report published this year, entitled We Are the Walking Dead.

It details bombings and shootings, including an assault on a bus full of pilgrims, when gunmen came back to kill wounded survivors as they were taken to hospital. "There is no travel route, no shopping trip, no school run, no work commute that is safe," the report said.

The UK government has scheduled Hazara's deportation for 21 October on the grounds that he would be safe in other parts of the country, he told the Guardian. But they still plan to fly him to Quetta, the Balochistan capital and his hometown, where threatening letters have been hand-delivered to the house where his wife and parents live. He worries he may not even make to his front door.

"The threatening letters that were sent to my home say very clearly if I don't stop talking against the extremist groups or if I come back to Pakistan they will behead me," Hazara said in a phone interview from the detention centre where he is being held.

"I fear they can just "disappear" me from the airport, because they have good contacts with the security people as well, who have been infiltrated by the religious extremists."

Even if he does survive the journey, it is not clear where he might go if he left his job. There have been sectarian killings across Pakistan, and some of the emailed death threats have been traced to Karachi, a port city several hundred miles away from Quetta, and Hyderabad, another distant town.

"We will deal with you the same way as we do with your people in Quetta, who are sent to hell," someone using the name Abdul Haq Jhangvi wrote to him in 2011. "We have decided to catch you alive, then, we will send your head [to] your people. We will teach you a good lesson so that no other person dares to write against the Taliban mujahideen. We will see you very soon."

Hazara, 36, was studying for an accountancy diploma in London when his concerns about rising sectarian violence pushed him to begin campaigning in 2009.

Outside the region, the scale of the killings is not well known and there is little pressure on Islamabad for change, while the Pakistani government has seemed largely indifferent to the steadily rising toll.

After the attack on the bus of pilgrims in 2011, the provincial chief minister, Aslam Raisani, said: "Of the millions who live in Balochistan, 40 dead [in this attack] is not a big deal. I will send a truckload of tissue papers to the bereaved families."

Determined to try to change those attitudes, Hazara founded the Hazara United Movement, a political campaign group, organising protests and sit-ins, writing op-eds and running a campaigning blog. Among other achievements, it helped lay the ground for a [House of Commons debate](#) this year on the situation in Balochistan.

His work did not go unnoticed at home, however. The first threats from the Taliban and Lashkar-e Jhangvi, one of Pakistan's most vicious Sunni militant groups arrived in 2010 and 2011. After a string of emailed warnings in English, and handwritten threats in Pashtu and Urdu, Hazara claimed asylum in September 2012, based on his high-profile political activities.

His first barrister failed to present the immigration tribunal with information he had prepared detailing how the threat to his life extended beyond Quetta, Hazara said. Two subsequent reports from a legal expert were rejected by the Home Office as insufficient grounds for asylum, he says, and he was refused a request for a judicial review of the case.

"My life is genuinely in danger, and the Home Office is not listening," said Hazara, who has been in detention since July with deportation set for next week. "I would like to request Human Rights Groups to campaign for me and exert more meaningful pressure."

Pakistani Christian couple brutally killed by mob for alleged 'blasphemy'

World Watch Monitor (05.10.2014)

https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2014/11/Article_3462820.html/ - A Pakistani mob beat to near-death a Christian and his pregnant wife for her alleged 'blasphemy', then threw them both into the large kiln where they both worked as bonded laborers.

The incident happened on Tuesday 3rd Nov, some 60 kilometers from Lahore, the capital of Punjab in central Pakistan - in Chak 59 village, Kot Radha Kishan.

The couple originally belonged to the historic Christian village Clarkabad, only 4 kilometers from Chak 59.

Several incidents of communal violence have taken place between Christians of Clarkabad and Muslims of surrounding villages in the recent past.

Their lives could have been saved if they'd fled after her alleged 'burning of the Qur'an', but the brick-making kiln owner refused to let them leave without re-paying their bonded loan.

This is a traditional method still used to enslave laborers across India and Pakistan, although officially illegal in Pakistan. The practice is recognized by the UN as a form of 'modern slavery.' (See below)

Two days before their murder, Shahzad Masih (26) and his five months-pregnant wife Shama Bibi (24) were accused of burning the pages of a Qur'an. (The couple already had four children - now orphans).

Parveen Bibi, wife of Masih's eldest brother, talked to World Watch Monitor at the scene the same day the joint murder happened.

She told us that his father Nazar Masih "used to do black magic" in which he used amulets and other documents that she said might have contained Qur'anic verses.

"On Sunday, Shama burned them all and threw the ashes on a garbage heap outside their quarters. Shama never meant any disrespect to Islam as she was totally illiterate and had no idea what the amulets contained," she said. "A few people recognized partially burned pages in the ash and raised a cry that Shama had burned the Qur'an."

Shahzad Masih and his five brothers worked for many years at the brick kiln, owned by Yousuf Gujjar.

Parveen said Shahzad and his brothers went to Gujjar to resolve the matter after the situation got tense in the village. "Gujjar on the one hand assured us that nothing would happen, and on the other hand asked his accountant not to let Shahzad and Shama flee the village without paying back their bond money", (taken from them as an 'advance' against their employment and wages).

By Monday night, some Muslim neighbors had informed the police of the alleged desecration and warned of a possible attack on the Christian couple, Parveen said.

"That night I had Shahzad and Shama sleep in my home so that if the police arrested them, at least we would know."

At about 6 a.m. when Shahzad and Shama went back to their own home in order to prepare for work, an angry mob began pouring into their quarters. Sensing the danger all the Christians fled except Shama's sister Yasmeen (married to Shahzad's brother Fiaz Masih).

Yasmeen said they were still preparing breakfast when a few more people knocked at their door and enquired about Shama. "They entered the house and one of the men dragged Shama out. Shama had their youngest daughter Poonam in her arms. That man snatched Poonam and threw her on the floor...So brick kiln guard Muhammad Akram rescued Shama and took her to the kiln office (only a few yards away from their house) and locked her in there, to save her from the attackers."

"Shama was crying and screaming for help. The guard went for her husband and asked him to join Shama in the room to console her, as the guard assured them that soon they would be taken out - after the protestors dispersed.

"By then, the number of mobsters was very small, but we could hear announcements being made from mosque loudspeakers in nearby villages - that a Christian woman had desecrated the Qur'an".

Yasmeen said people from five surrounding villages - Chak 60, Rosey, Pailan, Nawan Pindi and Hatnian - were gathered together by the residents of Chak 59 and their brick kiln coworkers.

"Soon thousands of men armed with clubs, hatchets and axes loaded onto tractors and trolleys began pouring in.

(The guard) Akram had locked the main kiln office door from the outside, but the angry protestors broke in anyway. But they failed to break the iron door of the office inside, and Shama and Shahzad must have locked it from inside."

The angry protestors then climbed on to the roof, and broke it in, "as if it was made of wood, straw and mud" said Yasmeen.

She says these men then opened the door from inside and brought the couple into the open, where the highly-charged protestors were ready to attack.

"They beat them with wooden clubs on their heads, and hatchets, before they were both tied to a tractor and pulled out onto a road which was under construction, covered with crushed stones."

"I think they were unconscious, but still breathing, but the mob was still not willing to leave them alone," said Yasmeen. "They took some petrol from a tractor and doused their bodies and threw them in the kiln. Then I lost hope and fled with my children from there."

Another relative, Parvaiz Shehzad, who also lives in Clarkabad, said that Muslims of neighboring villages "were very much jealous of Christians". The village is named after Robert Clark (1825–1900), the first Anglican missionary to Pakistan. Parvaiz Shehzad said it was the first village in the district that had electricity, a bank, a post office and a high school.

"Most educated people of surrounding villages had studied in Clarkabad...Strife between the Christian villagers and Muslim villagers has been a common feature in recent years".

As Shehzad and Shama were of Clarkabad, he claims jealousy came into play.

The dead woman's sister Yasmeen says that during the entire violent attack, a police van was present, but because they were so few, the police did not take charge. "Some men asked them to fire into the air to quell the protestors, because the mob had no weapons to fire back...Shama and her husband might have survived if the police had taken timely action."

Heavy contingents of police did arrive at the scene after the crowd had killed the couple. A local media reports that the police have arrested at least 42 people in connection with the case.

The police themselves filed the case and lodged the First Information Report (FIR), [no. 475/14], registered in Kot Radha Kishan Police Station. The FIR states that 500 to 600 men tortured the Christian couple. The FIR identifies 60 men by name and says that: "the incident took place after the above-nominated persons gathered a crowd of people and roused their passion through false announcements from the mosque (loudspeakers) of desecration of the Qur'an."

The remains of the couple were hastily buried at midnight, to avoid Christian leaders being able to officiate, as had been earlier intended.

The dead woman's father Mukhtar Masih on Wednesday filed a petition with the help of Christian organization The Voice Society against the government's decision to become the complainant.

Talking to World Watch Monitor, he said he had served as a bonded laborers' leader for years, "and I know tactics the government uses to oppress us...Last night when I left the village, it had been decided that the funeral would be held the next day. But instead it was hastily done at midnight, as if our children were thieves. The Pakistani Christian

community has already seen the government's lack of seriousness in providing justice to them in the case of Joseph Colony (in Lahore), where the state is also a complainant.

"My daughter Yasmeen is the eyewitness of the entire incident, but she is not included in the FIR, so how can I know the state is committed to providing us justice?" he despaired.

The news went viral and was flashed onto all Pakistani TV channels, after which Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif immediately constituted a three-member committee headed by Secretary for Minority Affairs and Human Rights Javed Iqbal.

Talking to World Watch Monitor, Iqbal said the committee would soon visit the place and submit a report to the Chief Minister.

Parliamentarian Mary Gill, of the ruling Pakistan Muslim League-(Nawaz), told World Watch Monitor that the Chief Minister had already announced a police Task Force to deal with the issue of so-called 'vigilante justice'.

"The landmark judgment by the Supreme Court that came out in June this year provides a way to deal with the menace of this evil...We are hoping to table a bill soon to eradicate this social evil that has taken root in our society in recent years."

The killing of people merely on accusations, particularly of those accused of 'blasphemy', is becoming commonplace in Pakistan.

In 2009 more than 100 houses of Christians were looted and set on fire in the city of Gojra.

In 2013, thousands of Muslim fundamentalists attacked Joseph Colony, a Christian locality in the heart of Lahore.

The BBC reports that Muslims still constitute a majority of those prosecuted for blasphemy, followed by Muslim minority Ahmadis. However, as Christians constitute 1.5% of the population, the proportion of blasphemy cases

According to Centre for Research and Security Studies (CRSS), there have been more than 52 extrajudicial killings in the context of blasphemy in two decades in Pakistan.

Family pleads for Mohammad Asghar, Briton on blasphemy charge in Pakistan

Lawyer says UK government has failed Asghar, 70, who has been diagnosed with severe paranoid schizophrenia

The Guardian (26.09.2014) <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/sep/26/family-pleads-mohammad-asghar-briton-blasphemy-charge-pakistan> - The family of a British man shot in a Pakistan prison where he is being held on blasphemy charges is appealing for his safety.

Mohammad Asghar, 70, was apparently shot and injured by a prison guard at Adiala prison in Rawalpindi on Thursday morning.

Asghar, from Edinburgh, was sentenced to death in January after writing letters to a number of people claiming to be the prophet Mohammed.

His family, who will speak at a press conference in Glasgow on Friday, say he has a long history of mental illness and needs specialist care which he is not receiving in jail.

Family solicitor Aamer Anwar has urged first minister Alex Salmond and prime minister David Cameron to intervene so that Asghar can be removed without delay to a secure medical facility and transferred to the UK.

Anwar said: "To date the British government has failed to provide any meaningful assistance to Mr Asghar or his family. It is now too late to wait for discussions behind closed doors and other delaying tactics.

"The next 48 hours will be critical for Mr Asghar's personal safety."

Asghar was arrested in 2010 in Rawalpindi after a blasphemy complaint was brought against him by a tenant with whom he was having a dispute.

He had previously been diagnosed as suffering from severe paranoid schizophrenia, but this was not taken into account by the authorities during his trial, Anwar said.

He said prison doctors had failed to acknowledge the severity of Asghar's psychiatric illness and he had been given only the most basic antidepressant medication.

A Foreign Office spokesman said on Thursday: "We have raised our concerns with the local authorities at a senior level."

A Pakistani scholar accused of Blasphemy is shot dead

The New York Times (18.09.2014) - A liberal Muslim scholar who had been accused of blasphemy for a speech he gave during a visit to the United States was shot and killed in Karachi on Thursday, the city police said.

The scholar, Muhammad Shakil Auj, was the dean of Islamic studies at the state-run University of Karachi.

Unidentified gunmen on a motorbike attacked the vehicle he was riding in on his way to a reception at his honor at the Iranian Consulate.

Dr. Auj was shot in the head and neck and died immediately, officials said. A female student in the back of the car was shot in the arm and was treated at a hospital.

A week earlier, a visiting religious scholar at the same Islamic studies department, Maulana Masood Baig, was also shot dead by unknown attackers.

Dr. Auj, 54, had earlier complained to the police about death threats he began receiving after delivering a speech in the United States in 2012, his colleagues and the police said.

Nasir Lodhi, a senior police official, said that Dr. Auj told the police that four professors at the University of Karachi had accused him of blasphemy for comments he made during that speech. Mr. Lodhi said he could not say where the speech was made, or the nature of the offending comments.

Dr. Auj lodged a criminal complaint against the four professors, who were later arrested by the police. One of them, Dr. Abdul Rasheed, had previously held Dr. Auj's position as dean of Islamic studies at the university. The four men face trial but are currently free on bail, the police said.

Around the same time, a religious seminary in Karachi issued a fatwa against Dr. Auj, accusing him of blasphemy and calling for his death.

Pir Muhammad Shah, a senior police official, said the four professors were being questioned again after Dr. Auj's killing. "At this stage, it is premature to say anything about the killing of Auj."

Blasphemy is punishable by death under Pakistani law, and accusations of blasphemy have inspired a rising tide of vigilante killings in recent years that are seen as a sign of growing intolerance in the country.

Human rights groups say the laws are frequently abused in pursuit of personal or professional grudges.

Dr. Auj, who was considered a progressive liberal in his field, had written 15 books about Islam and was a regular participant in television debates about religious issues, according to a profile on the University of Karachi website.

Last month, the government awarded him a presidential medal of distinction for his contribution in the fields of education and research.

The Karachi police chief, Ghulam Qadir Thebo, announced a reward of two million rupees, the equivalent of about \$20,000, for information leading to the arrest of Dr. Auj's killers.

His students mounted a protest outside Karachi University. On campus, some teachers said they would indefinitely boycott their classes.

"The government has failed to protect our teachers," said Ahmad Ali Shah, a student at the Islamic studies department, during the protest.

Blasphemy laws: legislation and history

By Willy Fautré, *Human Rights Without Frontiers*

HRWF (16.09.2014) - Pakistan has a population of 187.3 million people. Islam is the state religion and is practiced by up to 98% of the people.

Pakistan has at least four major distinct cultures and languages. It is the sixth most populous country in the world. It ranks 146th on the human development index (UNDP 2014). School enrolment is 68%, adult literacy 50%.

The Muslim majority is mainly made up of Sunni Muslims although it is estimated that 5% to 20% of Muslims are Shi'a. Christians, Hindusⁱ and other minorities make up the remainder of the population, about 6.5 million.

The state of Pakistan was formed on 14th August 1947 as a division of India, recognizing the religious and ethnic diversity of the federating units. In his presidential address to the Constituent Assembly on 11th August 1947, Mohammad Ali Jinnah made it clear that all

citizens would have equal rights irrespective of caste, colour or creed. At the time of Partition, Christians moved to Pakistan expecting equality. Two years after the creation of Pakistan, various religious actors rallied together to make it an Islamic state. Soon after the demise of the leader in September 1948, the religious actors managed to pass the Objectives Resolution (March 1949) through the Constituent Assembly which provided the necessary base for a religious state. This resolution provided guidelines for framing the Constitution of the State of Pakistan saying: "wherein the principles of democracy, freedom, equality, tolerance and social justice as enunciated by Islam shall be fully observed; wherein the Muslims shall be enabled to order their lives in the individual and collective sphere in accordance with the teaching and requirements of Islam as set out in the Holy Quran and the Sunnah." This religious base was later vigorously used by the religious lobby to make a point for an Islamic shariah-based state.

The process of Islamization started in 1949 and continued in General Ayub and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto era.

The 1973 Constitution was further baptized especially by making Islam the State religion of Pakistan, the creation of the Federal Shariat Court and the incorporation of the 1949 Objectives Resolution (earlier placed as a preamble to these basic state documents) as part of the Constitution. Through constitutional amendment, an apartheid mode of Separate Electorates was imposed on religious minorities.ⁱⁱ They were thrown out of the national mainstream on the basis of the Two Nation Theory in order to appease the Jamate Islami, a conservative, far-right and radical Islamic party.

Another constitutional amendment in 1974 made it illegal for Ahmadisⁱⁱⁱ to declare themselves Muslims and prohibited them from using Islamic greetings in public places or calling their religious place of worship "mosques".

In July 1977, General Zia ul Haq imposed martial law and started to Islamize the country for which sharia law in the form of the Hudood Ordinances was introduced. These Ordinances made changes in the Penal Code whereby Islamic punishments, physical punishments, were imposed: lashes, cutting of hands and feet and stoning to death.

In 1984, the Evidence Act of 1872 was replaced by the 'Qanune Shahadat' whereby its provisions were to be read in conjunction with the Quran and the Sunnah and credibility of witnesses was based on observing Islamic Injunctions.

All these developments at state level encouraged religious extremism and pressure for a theocratic state. Consequently, this situation encouraged socio-religious intolerance and violence in the name of religion with the tacit agreement of the state actors, the support of feudal and tribal lords and the military establishment.

Death Penalty and Prison Terms

The penalty for offending the Qu'ran or Prophet Muhammad can be death penalty, life imprisonment or a prison term of up to 10 years with or without fine.

Contravening the country's blasphemy law are

- death for "defiling Prophet Muhammad";
- life imprisonment for "defiling, damaging, or desecrating the Qur'an";
- 10 years' imprisonment for "insulting another's religious feelings."

Sections 298 (b) and 298 (c) of the Penal Code prohibit Ahmadis from calling themselves Muslims, referring to their religious beliefs as Islam, preaching or propagating their religious beliefs, inviting others to accept Ahmadi teachings or insulting the religious feelings of Muslims. The punishment for violation of these provisions is imprisonment for up to three years and a fine. Religious parties oppose any amendments to the constitution affecting its Islamic clauses, especially the ones relating to Ahmadis.

Penal Code

“Section 295-A: Deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs. Whoever, with malicious and deliberate intention of outraging the religious feelings of any class of the citizens of Pakistan, by words, either spoken or written or by visible representations, insults or attempts to insult the religion or religious beliefs of that class, shall be **punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to ten years**, or with fine, or with both.” (1927)

“Section 295-B: Defiling the Holy Koran. Whoever willfully defiles, damages or desecrates a copy of the Holy Koran or of an extract there from or used it in any derogatory manner or for any unlawful purpose shall be **punishable with imprisonment for life.**” (1990)

“Section 295-C: Use of derogatory remarks in respect of the Holy Prophet. Whoever, by words either spoken or written, or by visible representation, or by imputation, innuendo or insinuation, directly or indirectly, defiles the sacred name of the Holy Prophet Mohammad (peace upon him) shall be **punished by death** and shall also be liable to fine.” (1990)

Section 298-A: Whoever by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representation, or by any imputation, innuendo or insinuation, directly or indirectly, defiles the sacred name of any wife (*Ummul-Mumudeen*), or members of the family (*Ahle-bait*) of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him), or any of the righteous Caliphs (*Khulafa Raashideen*) or companions (*Sahaaba*) of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for **a term which may extend to three years**, or with fine, or with both. (1980)

Section 298-B. (1) Any person of the Qadiani group or the Lahori group (who call themselves 'Ahmadis' or by any other name) who by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representation,

(a) refers to, or addresses, any person, other than a Caliph or companion of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), as '*Ameer-ul-Mumineen*,' '*Khalifa-tul-Mumnineen*', '*Khalifa-tul-Muslimeen*, '*Sahaabi*' or '*Razi Allah Anho*';

(b) refers to, or addresses, any person, other than a wife of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), as '*Ummul-Mumineen*';

(c) refers to, or addresses any person, other than a member of the family (*Ahle-bait*) of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), as *Ahle-bait*; or

(d) refers to, or names, or calls, his place of worship as 'Masjid':

shall be punished with **imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to three years**, and shall also be liable to fine.

(2) Any person of the Qadiani group or Lahori group (who call themselves 'Ahmadis' or by any other name) who by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representation, refers to the mode or form of call to prayers followed by his faith as '*Azan*', or recites *Azan* as used by the Muslims, shall be punished with **imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to three years**, and shall also be liable to fine. (1984)

Section 298-C. Any person of the Qadiani group or the Lahori group (who call themselves 'Ahmadis' or by any other name), who, directly or indirectly, poses himself as a Muslim, or calls, or refers to, his faith as Islam, or preaches or propagates his faith, or invites others to accept his faith, by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representations, or in any manner whatsoever outrages the religious feelings of Muslims, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description of a term which may extend to three years and shall also be liable to fine. (1984)^{iv}

Blasphemy Issues

The history of the Blasphemy Laws is rooted in the Indian Penal Code of 1860, established during the time of British colonization and endorsed by the then British Governor General. Section 295 of Chapter XV "Of Offences Relating to Religion" was then saying:

Whoever destroys, damages or defiles any place of worship or any object held sacred by any class of persons with the intention of thereby insulting the religion of any class of persons or with the knowledge that any class of persons is like to consider such destruction, damage or defilement as an insult to their religion, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to two years or fine or both.

In 1860, Section 298 of the Penal Code was saying:

Whoever, with the deliberate intention of wounding the religious feelings of any person, utters any word or makes any sound in the hearing of that person or makes any gesture in the sight of that person or places any object in the sight of that person, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to one year, or with fine, or with both.

In 1927, a Hindu publisher, Mahashay Rajpal, published an allegedly provocative book on the life of Prophet Mohammad (Rangila Rasul) written by a then unknown author that outraged the Muslim community. Rajpal was later assassinated for his 'blasphemy' by a Muslim zealot, Ilam Din. His murderer was hung and is still hailed as a martyr by the Muslim community.

In the aftermath of this incident, the British rulers incorporated an additional section identified as Section 295-A which reads:

Whoever, with deliberate and malicious intention of outraging the religious feelings of any class of His Majesty's subjects, by words, either spoken or written, by visible representations, insults or attempts to insult religion or religious beliefs of that class, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to two years, or with fine or with both.

The objective of this amendment was to avoid conflicts between Muslims and Hindus and the legal framework remained unchanged until the early 1980s.

In 1982, under the leadership of General Zia ul Haq, section 295B was introduced to Chapter XV (Of Offences Relating to Religion) of the 1860 Penal Code. No debate took place by the unelected parliament (the members of which were handpicked by the military regime) nor outside the parliament.

Succeeding General Zia, General Musharraf was supported by the US and its allies and not only failed to bring any change in the Blasphemy Laws, but also allowed extremist outfits to continue to work under new names. Under increased pressure of the Islamic religious lobby, a Section 295-C was added which states:

Use of derogatory remarks in respect of the Holy Prophet. Whoever, by words either spoken or written, or by visible representation, or by imputation, innuendo or insinuation, directly or indirectly, defiles the sacred name of the Holy Prophet Mohammad (peace upon him) shall be punished by death or imprisonment for life and shall also be liable to fine.

However, a petition was successfully presented before the Federal Shariat Court by a zealous member of Jamate Islami and the alternative punishment of life imprisonment was deleted.

The Blasphemy Laws have been mostly abused by religious extremist organizations as well as banned terrorist outfits, resulting in the persecution of minorities. It is important to point out that this includes a large percentage of Muslim minorities such as Shiites and Ahmadis.

The Pakistan's People Party (PPP) was considered to be a liberal political party and many expected that it would radically modify, if not repeal, the various laws being used against the minorities but this has failed to happen. The far-right takes the existence of the law as an expression of its political supremacy and guards it with great jealousy.

Between 1927 and 1986, less than ten cases of blasphemy were reported but according to Naeem Shakir^v, there have been as many as 4000 since then^{vi}:

Out of these 4000 cases, under blasphemy laws, 49% are against Muslims, 26% against Ahmadis, 21% against Christians. Hindus were involved in lesser percentage. In ratio, of total population, the blasphemy cases against non-Muslims are almost 50%, which shows the indiscriminate use or abuse of the laws.

Since 1990, fifty-two (52) people accused of blasphemy were extra-judicially killed: 25 were Muslims, 15 were Christians, five were Ahmadis, one was Buddhist and one was Hindu, according to the Centre for Research and Security Studies (CRSS), a research group based in Islamabad.

Mere filing of a case against someone is believed to be an evidence of the offence. Calls are made from mosques that there is a blasphemer in the town and this incites people to come out to kill. Some accused were assassinated even before a case could be registered against them, some in police custody and others while serving their prison term.

Accusations are frequently instrumentalized to settle personal scores, to target religious minorities or to further extremist agendas. Local court hearings are often attended by large and aggressive groups of supporters from the claimant's side, threatening defendants, lawyers and judges alike.

It is also important to note that two-third of the cases are in Punjab, where 80% of the Pakistani Christians live.^{vii} So, it is the worst affected state. Most cases are based on allegations, not hard facts, and a large amount of cases are against mentally ill people. Most tried cases are acquitted but once people have been labeled a blasphemer, they are almost as good as dead; despite the acquittal.

The 2014 Annual Report of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom has released a list of 17 people on the death row and 19 people sentenced to life imprisonment for alleged activities considered blasphemous or religiously insulting in Pakistan.

Some Incidents in 2014

January

In the city of Rawalpindi, Muhammad Asghar, a 70-year-old British man arrested in 2010 after writing letters to several people claiming to be a prophet, was sentenced to death by a Pakistani court. Although Asghar was diagnosed as a paranoid schizophrenic and had treatment at the Royal Victoria Hospital in Edinburgh, the court rejected the medical reports.

April

A Pakistani couple, Shafgat Emmanuel and Shagufta Kausar, were sentenced to death for blasphemy for allegedly sending a text message insulting the Prophet Muhammad. The imam of their local mosque, the one who received the message, brought a complaint against the couple in July of the previous year.

6 May

In the town of Larkana, an accusation of blasphemy resulted in an attack against Hindus. Around midnight, a mob smashed statues with clubs, looted gold artefacts and set the Hindu temple on fire.

7 May

Rashid Rehman, a human rights lawyer representing a teacher in a blasphemy case in Multan, was killed. He was representing Junaid Hafeez, an English professor arrested in 2013 and accused of insulting the Prophet Mohammed on Facebook. Rehman was murdered by gunmen posing as clients in his office.

16 May

In Sharaqpur village (near Lahore), 65-year-old Khalil Ahmad, accused of blasphemy, was killed by gunshots in a police station by a 15-year-old boy. The young man presented himself to police and asked to see Ahmad. Once he met the man, he shot him. The boy was arrested by police.

Ahmad, along with other three people, had complained to a shopkeeper for the displacement of a sign containing offensive comments about Ahmadis. The shopkeeper refused to comply and filed a formal complaint of blasphemy against Khalil Ahmad, who was later arrested.

17 May

Three cases of blasphemy were registered in different parts of the country. The first case was filed against a small group of Jehovah's Witnesses in Mirpurkhas. Javed Younus, his wife Nazia Javed, Sri Lankan national Carol David and Rose Marry were arrested for handing out their organisation's Watchtower leaflets.

The second case concerned a young Muslim who allegedly burnt the Qur'an. Neighbours gathered and started to beat him, until the police intervened to take him into custody.

The third case was against Pakistan's biggest media tycoon, Mir Shakeel-ur-Rehman, a morning show host, a film actress and her husband for allegedly airing a show with blasphemous content on a morning TV show titled "Utho Jago Pakistan".

¹ In 1947, 20% of the population were Hindus. Nowadays only 1.7%.

² Ten out of 342 seats in the parliament are allocated to minority representatives. The *Jamiat Ulma-e-Islam* (JUI) condemns extremism and terrorism. In the last ten years it has been raising its voice for equal rights for minorities, though unsuccessfully.

³ Ahmadiyya is an Islamic reformist movement, founded toward the end of the 19th century. Pakistan is the home of the largest Ahmadi population in the world.

⁴ See comment of Article 298-A,B,C at Refworld:

<http://www.refworld.org/docid/3df4be8e8.html> (Pakistan: Whether section 298 of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) refers to any offence under religious law or Shari'a and, if so, the penalty under religious law or Shari'a). Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada.

"Referring to the text of section 298 of the PPC, a professor of law at Harvard University who specializes in Islamic law stated that, to his understanding, there are other penal provisions in Pakistan which are meant to be declarative of Shari'a which carry a much more severe punishment (15 Jan. 2002). According to the professor these provisions purport to enact the old Shari'a form of the crime of blasphemy – insult to the Prophet, the Qur'an, and other holy personages – and allow for the death penalty (ibid.).

The professor went on to state that "this reflects one form at least of the Shari'a crime of *sabb al-nabi* or insult to the Prophet" and, while in the "usual circumstances rarely enforced," often carries a death penalty with no possibility of repentance for anyone who was proved to have either spoken words or carried out acts insulting to God, the Prophet, his family, or the angels (ibid.).

(...) According to the professor, the offences as described in section 298 "are not Shari'a penalties per se, taken in any literal way from old books" (ibid.). The professor concluded that "Pakistani judges do not apply the Shari'a directly except insofar as they may refer to it in guiding their interpretation of the laws and insofar as certain higher courts have the power to test the conformity of statutes with Shari'a principles and to declare them unconstitutional in the event they fail that test" (ibid.).

For a description of the use of section 298 and section 295 of the PPC, which compose Pakistan's laws on blasphemy, please refer to Amnesty International's May 2001 publication entitled "Pakistan: Insufficient Protection of Religious Minorities" available at <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/ASA33/008/2001/en/4bce2d66-d95a-11dd-a057-592cb671dd8b/asa330082001en.html>

⁵ Blasphemy Law in Pakistan: Historical Perspectives and Disastrous Effects/ Background Resources in Misuse of the Blasphemy Law and Religious Minorities in Pakistan (Commission of the Churches on International Affairs, World Council of Churches (2013)

⁶ Between 1998 and 2005, 647 persons were charged on the grounds of blasphemy.

⁷ More than half of them live in seven districts of Central Punjab : Lahore, Faisalabad, Kasur, Sheikhupura, Sialkot, Gujranwala and Toba Tek Singh.

Pakistani Police charge Christians under blasphemy charges

Adapted from Pakistan Christian Post

<http://www.pakistanchristianpost.com/headlinenews.php?hnewsid=4953> (06.09.2014) - On 4th September 2014 at around 11:00 am Mr. Joseph Francis MBE (National Director of CLAAS, the Centre for Legal Aid, Assistance and Settlement, which works to assist Pakistani Christians in difficulty) was informed about a blasphemy case that had been filed by local Muslims at Murid Wala Police Station against 55 Christian residents of a small village (Chak no. 206 of Tehsil Samandri District Faisalabad). Police raided Christian homes, issued threats and arrested fourteen the same evening. The Christians were afraid and worried for those who were arrested, because in the past some have died in police custody after having been falsely accused of blasphemy, according to sources.

Knowing the sensitivity of the issue, a CLAAS team went to the area to collect facts

regarding the case, including Mr. MBE, Ms. Katherine Sapna (Program Officer) Ms. Rama Rasheed (Assistant Program Officer), Mr. Sohail Habel (Finance Manager) and Mr. Hunny Bashir (Assistant in-charge Legal Department). The team arrived at Murid Wala Police Station at 17:30 and met Mr Muhammad Yar Wattoo, the officer in charge of the investigation

Statement of Muhammad Yar Wattoo:

Although the case had just been registered the day before, the Investigating Officer (IO) gave assurances that there would be a fair investigation, indicating that there are some gaps in the case. CLAAS Director suggested to the Station House Officer (SHO) and the IO that the charge of blasphemy (295-C in the Pakistani Penal Code) cannot be lodged, as the original statement was about the illegal encroachment of Christians on an old Muslim cemetery.

After a long exchange, the SHO understood the point. He then asked the Investigating Officer to change the section 295-C in the First Information Report (FIR) according to the supplementary statement and to cite instead section 297 on insulting or wounding the feelings of someone on the grounds of religion. CLAAS team again suggested to the SHO and IO that no blasphemy offence had been committed and therefore no section regarding blasphemy should figure in the FIR.

The SHO assured his full cooperation, saying that he would try his best to aid the reconciliation between local Christians and Muslims. He added that this was a property matter of an old graveyard and that there was a misunderstanding between the parties. The IO said that he would release everyone upon completion of the investigation, assuring the team that the Christians were safe and the matter would be handled peacefully.

The SHO asked the CLAAS team to tell the Christians who were not arrested to apply for their pre-arrest bails and come to the police station. Meanwhile the police said they would see how a compromise in this case could be achieved.

Meeting with the arrested people:

Mr. Joseph Francis was able to meet with the detainees and assured them that CLAAS would support them throughout the process. CLAAS will provide free legal assistance and all the moral support they need during their detention. The CLAAS team arranged for food to be brought to them, as they were hungry and their family members would not come to the police station out of fear. The team also left them some money for purchasing food in the Police Station cafeteria.

The Christians claimed that they were innocent of blasphemy and that the incident was caused by a misunderstanding for which they have apologised numerous times. They are also worried about their families' safety.

The CLAAS team raised concerns for the safety of Mohson s/o Safdar Masih, age 12, who was also being held by the police. Police said that he would be released soon and given over to the custody of his mother.

Background about the area:

More than 350 Christian families live alongside 1000 Muslim families in Chak no. 206, Tehsil Samandri District, Faisalabad. There were a lot Christians in the area before the partition of India and Pakistan. Christians were later given land for a graveyard; Muslims were given 24 acres for the same purpose. In more recent years Christians have run out of space and faced problems burying their dead. They shared their concern with a Muslim land owner Ch. Muhammad Wasif s/o Haji Iqbal, who suggested the Christians use a graveyard which belonged to Muslims but was not currently in use. In fact, the land was

Wasif's property; however he failed to issue any legal documentation concerning this arrangement.

Incident

On 3rd September 2014 at 09:00, a group of Christians went to the abandoned graveyard with a tractor and started to level the surface of the land to build a boundary wall. After they finished their work, they were going home at around 14.00 when they were attacked by a group of Muslims, including Ashiq Hussain, Qaiser, Muhammad Shahbaz, Liaqat Ali, Waqas s/o Liaqat Ali, Muhammad Yasin s/o Muhammad Sadiq, Muhammad Naseem s/o Muhammad Ali, Muhammad Amjad (Numberdar) and representatives of the area police. The angry mob started shouting and used a slang language to insult the Christians for illegal encroachment into the Muslim graveyard which contained the bodies of their forefathers. The Muslims issued many threats against the Christians. The Christians informed the mob that they had asked and were given permission by Muhammad Wasif to use the graveyard as a Christian graveyard. Furthermore the Christians also said that they did not want to use the land if it created more disputes.

After a long argument the Christians admitted their mistake and issued an apology. They went back to the graveyard and dismantled the wall they had made as a boundary. Meanwhile the Muslim group secretly issued a complaint against 55 Christians at the Murid Wala police station for crimes of blasphemy and other criminal offences. FIR No. is 316/14 for offences under section 295-C, 506-B, 447, 148, 149. The police then started raiding the houses of the Christians accused early in the morning and arrested them. The police had broken the gates of Christian houses and arrested fourteen Christians men: Phool Masih s/o Manzoor Masih, Haroon Masih s/o Robin Masih, Farid Masih s/o Nazir Masih, Bagga Masih s/o Khursheed Masih, Arshad Masih s/o Aslam Masih, Waris Masih S/o Khursheed Masih, Mushtaq Masih s/o Bhagtu Masih, Nazir Masih s/o Gundu Masih, Arshad Masih s/o Liaqat Masih, Tariq Masih s/o Ichhar Masih, Zulfiqar Masih s/o Jeeb Masih, Arshad Masih S/o Sharif Masih, Hanif Masih s/o Fazal Masih, and Mohson Masih s/o Safdar Masih (Late). The remaining Christians and their families were frightened because of the blasphemy charge and escaped from their houses as the mob threatened to burn their houses. They were also worried about their fellow Christians who had been arrested as there had been several incidents when Christians were murdered whilst in police custody.

Demands of CLAAS team:

Mr. Joseph Francis MBE urged police to remove 295-C PPC from the registered FIR because it was not applicable in this matter. He suggested to the police to add 297 PPC which is specifically used for the desecration of graves. Mr. Francis argued over the difference between 295-C and 297 PPC for three hours and after long discussion CLAAS team were able to persuade the police to drop section 295-C which is a non-bail offence and which also carries the death penalty. Police also added 297 PPC in the FIR as a bail offence and the punishment for this crime is not so severe. CLAAS team asked the police to call upon both parties to settle the matter in the police station because the Christians were ready to apologise for what they did.

Team Observation:

- Christians in this area are deprived of their equal rights and neglected by the Member Provincial Assembly and Member National Assembly and other influential people to address issues such as graveyard space.
- Christian leadership did not try to ask the relevant authorities to allot a piece of land for their graveyard.
- In these areas of Faisalabad, blasphemy law is often used as a weapon by the public at large.

- Team observed that Muslims deliberately accused Christians under 295-C, and the police under pressure agreed to put this charge in the FIR.
- CLAAS team is not fully satisfied with the police cooperation and do not trust the police because of previous bad experiences when the police ignored human rights and just aimed to please Muslim religious parties.
- If the police have concern for the Christian community or they agree and believe in compromise between the two parties to live side by side, then why did they arrest so many Christians, including Mohson aged 12?
- Police need training workshops on human rights and need education about laws and which sections to use when pressing charges.

Atheist Ex-Muslims Sher Shah Jogzei, Syed Muhammad Tabish and Muhammad Shamoon must be granted asylum by Home Office

Campaign by the Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain

Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain (05.08.2014) <http://ex-muslim.org.uk/2014/08/urgent-action-atheist-ex-muslims-sher-shah-jogzei-syed-muhammad-tabish-and-muhammad-shamoon-must-be-granted-asylum-by-home-office> - Pakistani ex-Muslim atheists Sher Shah Jogzei, Syed Muhammad Tabish and Muhammad Shamoon are currently detained in Harmondsworth IRC, which is a Cat B prison. Their crime? They have left Islam and want to live a life free from threats and intimidations prevalent in Pakistan.

Jogzei's date for deportation has been set for 5th August 2014. Tabish's deportation on 5th August has been cancelled and he has been granted 5 days to prepare for a fresh asylum trial.

The Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain Case Manager Tanjir Sugar visited the three men at the detention to find out more about their cases and offer support. One of the men, Sher Shah was harassed by some of his fellow Muslim detainees. Rather than being given protection, he has been taken into isolation.

The Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain knows only too well the dangers involved for those who renounce Islam and become atheists in countries where Sharia rules apply. Pakistan is officially an Islamic Republic. The government often uses its blasphemy law to prosecute atheists and those who allegedly hurt religious sentiments or defame Islam's prophet Muhammad.

The above three men face great risk of persecution for openly and publicly leaving Islam and for being critical of Islam if they are returned. They have also been ostracised from their families and have no safe place to return to.

Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain calls on the Home Office to immediately release Pakistani ex-Muslim atheists Sher Shah Jogzei, Syed Muhammad Tabish and Muhammad Shamoon from detention and grant them asylum.

To support the cases of these men, please Tweet the Home Office: @ukhomeoffice or write to Home Secretary Theresa May asking for their right to asylum at 2 Marsham Street, London SW1P 4DF or via email: public.enquiries@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk.

Mob kills 3 Ahmadis – a woman, a young girl, & a baby

Asian Human Rights Commission (29.07.2014) - On Sunday evening, July 27, a crowd of around 150 fanatics attacked a small, peaceful community of 17 Ahmadi families living in Arafat Colony, on the outskirts of Gujranwala district, Punjab. As a result of the attack, eight houses were burned down. Three Ahmadis in one of the houses succumbed to the flames. All the three were female, and two were young children.

Not only have the federal and provincial governments failed to provide security for the community, no move has been made to arrest the local mosque leader who delivered a hate speech, calling for the murder of Ahmadis.

Those killed in the attack include Bashiran, a 55-year-old woman, Kainat, an eight-month-old baby girl, and Hira, a seven-year-old girl. Another Ahmadi woman, seven months pregnant, suffered a miscarriage and lost her baby. Eight others have been badly burnt and are in hospital. A storage building and several vehicles have also been attacked over the alleged blasphemy.

Local Muslim clergy have been engaged in spreading propaganda to incite people to kill Ahmadis. Such anti-Ahmadiyya attacks are fuelled, in part, by Pakistan's blasphemy laws, which targets Ahmadis and negates their rights to freedom of faith and religion.

According to unconfirmed reports, Ahmadi, Saqib, son of Ahmad Din, allegedly shared on Facebook a blasphemous picture of Khan-e-Kaaba with Ejaz, the son of a mosque leader. This was apparently the spark that ultimately led to the attack.

Then to fan the flames against Ahmadis, Ejaz claimed that Ahmadis had fired shots from the house of a local doctor, injuring Ejaz and another person. The two who claimed to have been injured in the shooting were, however, themselves involved in burning and attacking the houses of Ahmadis.

The mosque leader, Mailvi Zakariya of Jama Masjid Siddiquiya, delivered a fiery speech that incited the people of Maderassa to attack Ahmadis homes.

Fire trucks responding to the arson attacks had to turn back due to the gathered mob, and the local police prevented anybody from intervening to stop the fires. A large contingent of police was present, but they were unwilling to stop the violent mob.

Local residents and the media blame the Punjab provincial government for triggering sectarian killings in order to divert attention from the current political crisis, and to influence the judicial commission that is investigating the June 17 incident, in which 13 people were killed and 80 injured. In the June 17 incident, the Punjab government ordered the police to shoot directly at the demonstrators, who were resisting the police barricade outside the house of the religious and political leader, Allam Tahirul Qadri.

The news of this tragedy spread around the world and has been internationally condemned. In accordance with usual practice, the Pakistan Government has not even acknowledged the June 17 incident, forget about taking action against perpetrators or expressing sympathy to the bereaved.

The international community is well aware of the continuous murders of Ahmadis, on account of their beliefs. A few weeks ago, a young Ahmadi was murdered in Nawabshah,

in broad daylight, for reason other than being an Ahmadi. And, few months ago, an eminent cardiologist from the USA, who was in Pakistan to provide voluntary service, was also killed.

In response to attacks on Ahmadis, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan has stated the following:

"HRCP is shocked and disgusted at the killing of four citizens belonging to the Ahmadi faith after a blasphemy allegation. Four other Ahmadis were reported to be hospitalised in a critical condition. As things stand in the country now, particularly in Punjab, a blasphemy charge, however unfounded, makes such cold-blooded killings somehow less repulsive. The people who were killed were not even indirectly accused of the blasphemy charge. Their only fault was that they were Ahmadi. Torching women and children in their house simply because of their faith represents brutalisation and barbarism stooping to new lows. That the mob was dancing for the TV camera after torching the houses of people who were not even accused of blasphemy proves that the whole episode had nothing to do with blasphemy but was aimed at further victimising an already persecuted community."

Pakistan's controversial blasphemy law does not clearly define blasphemy, but states that the offence is punishable by death. Anyone can file a blasphemy case – claiming his or her religious feelings have been hurt. The accused are often lynched, and lawyers and judges defending or acquitting them have been attacked. Rights groups say the blasphemy law has been used to seize money and property.

The number of blasphemy accusations in Pakistan is rising, according to a 2012 study by the Center for Research and Security Studies, an Islamabad-based think-tank. In 2001, there was only one such complaint, but in 2011 there were as many as 80. Figures are yet unavailable but it appears 2014 will be a record year. In May 2014, 68 lawyers were charged with blasphemy for using the name 'Umar' in protest slogans against a police official of the same name. In the same month, prominent human rights lawyer Rashid Rehman, who was defending a university professor accused of blasphemy, was [shot and killed](#) after being threatened in court by other lawyers.

The Asian Human Rights Commission urges the government to stop the violent campaign against the Ahmadiyya community and take strong action against all the perpetrators and instigators. The actions of the attackers and the role of the mosque leader, Maulvi Zakariya, need to be investigated.

The government must stop the policy of appeasing fundamentalists. Action must be taken against the Gujranwala police as well, as they deliberately refused to intervene as the mob looted and burned the Ahmadi homes. The law against the use of loudspeakers from the mosques needs to be enforced; such loudspeakers are being used to broadcast religious and sectarian hatred throughout society.

Minorities hoodwinked yet again

Asian Human Rights Commission (18.07.2014) - Shortly before the end of his seven month term and following the Peshawar Church bombing last year which left more than 100 people dead, the Chief Justice of Pakistan, Justice Tassadduq Hussain Jilani, in a case *suo motu* (of his own accord) on the 19th of June 2014, issued a landmark judgment concerning the rights of religious minorities in Pakistan. In the 32-page judgment, Justice Jilani takes a tough stand against "hate speech and abuses

perpetrated on citizens, based on their faith". The Supreme Court judgement ordered the government to establish a National Council for the Rights of Minorities and set up a special "Task Force" to protect the places of worships of religious minorities. The judgement also instructs the government to put in place immediate measures for registering criminal cases against desecrators of places of worship and prepare appropriate and religiously unbiased curricula used in schools and colleges across the country.

The importance of the verdict is the formation of the National Council to safeguard the rights of minorities, which should be an independent state body that will duly monitor the status of ethnic and religious minorities in Pakistan along with cases of violence and discrimination against them.

In pursuance to the Supreme Court verdict, the government of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has commenced a process to establish the National Council on Minorities' rights. The government and the opposition have reached a consensus on the framework including the number and names of its members. The National Council will consist of 10-members with four Muslim members, and is to be announced shortly. However to the amusement of many, the government has finalized the entire process without having consulted key stakeholders being neither the representatives nor the minority groups themselves. Religious minority groups have termed such a move as undemocratic on the part of the Sharif government as well as the opposition. The religious minorities, particularly Christians and Hindus have deep reservations regarding the entire process of the formation of the National Council on the minorities. Their apprehensions are based upon similar such Commissions and councils set up on several previous occasions by several successive regimes in Pakistan.

Minority groups in Pakistan have always expressed reservations on such commissions; the likes of the Commission established by the then Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and which he chaired in 1973; yet another one was headed by Ijazul Haq (son of the former military dictator Zia ul Haq); and the one set up by the previous government of Pakistan People's Party under joint chairmanship of Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gillani and Federal Minister on minorities, Shahbaz Bhatti who was later assassinated by the Muslim militants.

The main objective of the above-mentioned Commissions was to promote the soft image of Islam and Pakistan – which objective proved futile in the efforts of protecting the rights of the minority groups in Pakistan. Further, all such previous commissions established since 1973 were against the principles enumerated in the Liaquat-Nehru Pact signed in 1950 – a treaty to guarantee the rights of minorities in both countries after the partition of India. The Pact was meant to constitute Commissions headed by Supreme Court Judges. Following the pact, India, immediately formed a Minority Commission under Chairmanship of the Supreme Court and Muslim leaders made presentation before the Commission to safeguard their personal laws, religious freedoms and requested an equal share in the resources of the states. Pakistan on the contrary, never constituted a Minority Commission nor provided any chance for minorities' leaders to make any representations nor demands for their rights.

Minorities in Pakistan fear that the latest initiative by the government following the Supreme Court judgement in this regard, from the Prime Minister Sharif's government seems to be a similar such futile effort, to hoodwink the minority in the name of minorities' protection. Therefore, the main objective of the Council being established this time around, is merely to promote interfaith, harmony and promoting the soft image of Pakistan, which is a complete disregard to the and averts the deeper objectives enumerated in the judgement which is to safeguard the rights of the minorities in Pakistan.

The Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) cautions the government of Pakistan, for the National Council being established not be another attempt, to continue the persecution of minority groups of religious minorities – hence such a council will neither be able to protect minorities and nor will help improve their rights situation. The process of formation of the National Council has yet to consider holding consultations with religious minority groups such as the Hindu communities, Christians, Ahmadi Muslims groups and other such ethnic groups.

The AHRC therefore urges the government to put into effect a mechanism, for the National Council to monitor the practical realization of the rights and safeguards of the religious and other minority groups in Pakistan as specifically provided for in the Constitution of Pakistan.

The Council must be based on the philosophy behind the speech of Mohammad Ali Jinnah - founder of Pakistan who on August 11, 1947, categorically said;

"You are free; you are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other place or worship in this State of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion or caste or creed that has nothing to do with the business of the State. Now I think we should keep that in front of us as our ideal and you will find that in course of time Hindus would cease to be Hindus and Muslims would cease to be Muslims, not in the religious sense, because that is the personal faith of each individual, but in the political sense as citizens of the State".

The newly formed Council must also have the mandate to frame policy recommendations for safeguarding and protecting minority rights by all the provincial and federal governments.

The government of Pakistan must show its sincerity about establishing an independent and autonomous council in line with the verdict of the Supreme Court of Pakistan to resolve the minorities' issue for good which can only be done, through a meaningful and a consultative process of all stakeholders in the establishment and in the working of this National Council.

A converted Ahmadi and his family under constant threat from religious extremists

AHRC (10.06.2014) - The Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) has received information that a Muslim national from the Shia community in Pakistan, the second largest sect of Islam, who has by his own choice, converted from Islam to Ahmadi religion is now facing threats to his life. The AHRC has also learnt that family members have kidnapped his wife and his child as punishment for adopting a religion of his choosing other than Islam. The community where he resides has declared him an infidel and has deemed that he is to be killed by the community due to his religious beliefs.

The AHRC has also received information that a nephew of the person has filed a First Information Report with the Police, accusing him of spreading hate against Muslims and for preaching Ahmedi ideology and religion in the community. According to reports the police have, in turn filed a criminal case against this person for instigating a sectarian violence. He is hiding in different cities as his name and photos have been sent to different religious groups that a Muslim has adopted Ahmadi religion which is against the basis of Islam.

The AHRC noted with concern, the persecution of Ahmadi's by religious fundamentalists in Pakistan, which has to date continued unabated and they have viewed conversions into the Ahmadi sect as one of the biggest crimes against Islamic principles.

Case narrative

According to the information received by the AHRC, Mr. Sharafat Din, 35 years of age, the son of Ahmed Mir and a resident of Gilgit-Baltistan province Pakistan, who hails from the Shia Sect of Islam, on his own choice adopted the Ahmadi faith in June last year (2013). The Shia Sect is the second largest sect of Islam.

Pakistan has officially declared the Ahmadis to be non-Muslims and in their freedom of religion has been curtailed by a series of ordinances, acts and constitutional amendments. The Ahmadi sect was declared un-Islamic by a constitutional amendment in 1974 and all other Islamic sects continue to discriminate against the Ahmadiyya community so much so that they are not even allowed to perform any Islamic rituals, they are also barred by law from worshipping in non-Ahmadi mosques or public prayer rooms, performing the Muslim call to prayer, using the traditional Islamic greeting in public and or publicly quoting from the Quran and any Ahmadi is meted with the ultimate punishment by killing if found engaging in any of these activities.

No sooner, Mr Sharafat Din adopted the Ahmadiyya faith he had started receiving threats from his family members, including his in-laws, his employer, Muslim militant groups, from even the law enforcement agencies such as the police and security guards posted in Gilgit-Baltistan province bordering China. The AHRC also learnt that Mr. Din, his wife and son had all been kidnapped while he was travelling from Islamabad to Chanab Nagar, the former Rabwa province which was the heart of the Ahmadiyya community, after attending an Ahmadiyya religious sermon.

Mr. Din was later detained for 15 days, together with his family at a house owned by his in laws in Gilgit province. During this time of detention, it is learnt that Mr. Din was severely beaten and tortured forcing him to convert back to Islam. According to information received by the AHRC, Mr. Din had been in a severely critical state, when his wife had helped him escape the captors. Following this incident and for orchestrating her husband's escape, Mr. Din's wife and young child have been forcibly taken away to an unknown location and Mr. Din claims that to-date he has not seen his wife and does not know the whereabouts of his family.

Mr. Din, worked as an employee of a commercial bank, Karakoram Cooperative Bank in Danyour Gilgit, before his conversion and as a result was forced to resign from his employment. Mr Din informed the AHRC that he was continuously being victimized by both the bank staff as well as the Manager following his conversion and according to him staff at the Bank have threatened him with inflicting physical punishment in public if he does not resign.

The First Information report filed against Mr. Din by his nephew accused him of preaching Ahmadiyya religion, which was made a criminal offence according to the constitutional amendment of 1984 by the then military dictator, General Zia-ul-Haq. Accordingly, on September 7, 2013 Danyour police have filed a case under section 157 of PPC for investigation against Mr. Din.

Further, the AHRC also learnt that officials of 'National Database and Registration Authority' (NADRA) in Gilgit, have forced Mr. Din to even withhold his National Identity Card due to his conversion from Islam to the Ahmadi faith. The NADRA is an authority which issues computerized national identity cards in Pakistan. According to Mr Din, staff at the NADRA have been hostile towards him, and have threatened him to immediately

withdraw his ID Card. Succumbing to such threats and pressure Mr Din had converted his ID Card and declared himself as an Ahmadi and his passport too cannot be renewed since the conversion. Under Pakistan regulations, in applying for a passport or a national ID card, all Pakistanis are required to sign an oath declaring Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (the founder of the Ahmadi faith) to be an impostor and all Ahmadis to be non-Muslims.

Mr. Din has also written letters to the Chief Justice of Pakistan, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and other human rights organizations to assist him to find his family. However to date, authorities have ignored his calls for assistance due to his faith. His calls for assistance have deliberately fallen on deaf ears of all these authorities due to an inherent fear of possible backlash from Islamic fundamentalists in Pakistan.

The AHRC learns that Mr. Din as a result is in hiding in different locations never staying in one place due to fear of attacks to his life from these Muslim fundamentalists who according to information have been in pursuit of him and he fears for his life.

Although the Constitution of Pakistan guarantees freedom to profess a religion of choice, as per Article 20 of the Constitution of Pakistan, contrary provisions have been enacted in the Pakistan Penal Code, which according to Section 298, which precludes this freedom to Ahmadis and any person professing the Ahmadi and 'in any manner ...outrages the religious feelings of Muslims,' are punishable with imprisonment of either three years or a fine. Further, although, the government of Pakistan has ratified the UN Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) which guarantees the right to freedom of thought religions and conscience , Pakistan has failed to enact domestic legislation nor let alone guarantee the right to freedom of conscience thought and religion, in its obligations to UN Convention.

These contradictions in law as well as practice of religious fundamentalism has accorded a free hand free hand to the extremists religious fundamentalists in Pakistan as well other powerful groups to take the law unto their own hands and wield it as they please in punishing innocent citizens for their religious beliefs and faith.

Additional information

The lives of the three others also Ahmadis, who have been accused of blasphemy, are yet in danger and the government has flatly refused to provide them with security.

Religious minorities in Pakistan are living in constant fear for their lives. In 1974 the Ahmadiyya sect was declared as Non-Muslim and the followers have been arrested for reading the Quran, holding religious celebrations and having Quranic verses on rings or wedding cards. According to Ahmadiyya Jamat, almost 400 Ahmadis have been murdered for their faith and belief in Pakistan and thousands arrested for declaring Islam to be their religion or following the Islamic Code of worship and the Islamic Code of Conduct.

Pakistan is today categorized amongst the failed States because of its indifferent attitude towards religious minorities. It is incapable of providing safety and security for its citizens and its irresponsible enforcement of blasphemy laws, which are grossly abused. All this has resulted in the victimisation law-abiding innocent Ahmadi Muslim citizens.

In an annual report, US Commission on International Religious Freedom said that Pakistan "represents the worst situation in the world for religious freedom" among countries that are not already on the US blacklist and that conditions in the past year "hit an all-time low." According to the report the 'Ahmadi minority in Pakistan live under something really resembling an apartheid-like system subject to severe legal restrictions," compared to that of the situation in South Africa's 1948-1994 system of forced racial separation. Ahmadis have faced a series of deadly attacks and desecration

of their graves. Ahmadis boycotted last year's election because they would have had to identify themselves as non-Muslims. The report also voiced alarm about Pakistan's treatment of Hindus, Christians and Shia Muslims. It said Pakistan has sentenced to death or jailed for life 36 people for blasphemy, far more than any other country in the world. Mr Din is yet another victim among many thousands more in Pakistan and AHRC urges authorities in Pakistan to heed to the calls for assistance from Mr Din, for his safety and to find his family.

Suggested action

Please write letters to the authorities calling for the safe recovery of Mr Din's wife and child and for their safety – they have been forcibly detained at an unknown location merely as a punishment for following a religious faith of his choice. Please also urge them to provide protection to Mr. Din and his family and take appropriate action against the family members of both the victims. The authorities must adhere to provisions of Article 20 of the Constitution of Pakistan, which safeguards freedom of religion. Action must also be instituted against, all officers at the NADRA in Gilgit for acts of discrimination and intimidations against Mr. Din as well as the government of Pakistan for the blatant failure to provide safety and security to persons professing other religions and for the failure to guarantee and enforce equal treatment and protection to all citizens of Pakistan.

Please note that the AHRC has written a separate letter to the UN Special Rapporteur on the Freedom to Religion or Belief calling for his intervention into this matter.

Sample letter

Dear,

PAKISTAN: A Call to protect the life of a converted Ahmadi and his family under constant threat from religious extremists in Pakistan

Name of victim:

Mr. Sharafat Din son of Ahmed Mir, and his family members, resident of village Nomal, Tehsil and District Gilgit, Gilgit and Baltistan province

Names of alleged perpetrators:

- 1.The family members of Mr. Sharafat Din, resident of village Nomal, Tehsil and District Gilgit, Gilgit and Baltistan province
2. Officials of NADRA, Gilgit and Baltistan
3. Station House Officer of Danyour police station, Gilgit and Baltistan

Date of incident: June 2013

Place of incident: Danyour, Gilgit and Baltistan

I am writing to voice my deep concern regarding Mr Sharafat Din, from Gilgit District Pakistan for him being continuously persecuted by his family members as well as religious fundamentalists for changing his faith from Islam to Ahmadi and continuous persecution of his family members.

I am shocked to know that Mr Sharafat Din's family members, his wife and young son are being detained at an unknown destination as a mode of punishment for changing Mr Din's faith from Islam to Ahmadiya sect.

According to the information I received Mr. Sharafat Din, 35 years of age, the son of Ahmed Mir and a resident of Gilgit-Baltistan province Pakistan, who hails from the Shia Sect of Islam, on his own choice adopted the Ahmadi faith in June last year (2013). The Shia Sect is the second largest sect of Islam.

I have also learnt that no sooner, Mr. Sharafat Din adopted the Ahmadiyya faith he had started receiving threats from his family members, including his in-laws, his employer, Muslim militant groups, from even the law enforcement agencies such as the police and other law enforcing agencies in Gilgit-Baltistan province, bordering China. According to information I received Mr. Din, his wife and son had all been kidnapped while he was travelling from Islamabad to Chanab Nagar, the former Rabwa province which was the heart of the Ahmadiyya community, after attending an Ahmadiyya religious sermon.

Mr. Din had been later detained for 15 days, together with his family at a house owned by his in laws in Gilgit province. During this time of detention, it is learnt that Mr. Din was severely beaten and tortured forcing him to convert back to Islam. According to information received by me Mr. Din had been in a severely critical state, when his wife had helped him escape the captors. Following this incident and for orchestrating her husband's escape, Mr. Din's wife and young child have been forcibly taken away to an unknown location and Mr. Din claims that to-date he has not seen his wife and does not know the whereabouts of his family.

Mr. Din, worked as an employee of a commercial bank, Karakoram Cooperative Bank in Danyour Gilgit, before his conversion and as a result was forced to resign from his employment. Mr Din according to reports, was continuously being victimized by both the bank staff as well as the Manager following his conversion and according to him staff at the Bank have threatened him with inflicting physical punishment in public if he does not resign.

The First Information report filed against Mr. Din by his nephew accused him of preaching Ahmadiyya religion, which was made a criminal offence according to the constitutional amendment of 1984 by the then military dictator, General Zia-ul-Haq. Accordingly, on September 7, 2013 Danyour police have filed a case under section 157 of PPC for investigation against Mr. Din.

Further, I also learnt that officials of 'National Database and Registration Authority' (NADRA) in Gilgit, have forced Mr. Din to even withhold his National Identity Card due to his conversion from Islam to the Ahmadi faith. The NADRA is an authority which issues computerized national identity cards in Pakistan. According to Mr. Din, staff at the NADRA have been hostile towards him, and have threatened him to immediately withdraw his ID Card. Succumbing to such threats and pressure Mr. Din had converted his ID Card and declared himself as an Ahmadi and his passport too cannot be renewed since the conversion. Under Pakistan regulations, in applying for a passport or a national ID card, all Pakistanis are required to sign an oath declaring Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (the founder of the Ahmadi faith) to be an impostor and all Ahmadis to be non-Muslims.

I am aware that Mr. Din has also written letters to the Chief Justice of Pakistan, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and other human rights organizations to assist him to find his family. However to date, authorities have ignored his calls for assistance due to his faith.

According to information I received, Mr. Din as a result is in hiding in different locations never staying in one place due to fear of attacks to his life from these Muslim fundamentalists who according to information have been in pursuit of him and he fears for his life.

I also remind here that although the Constitution of Pakistan guarantees freedom to

profess a religion of choice, as per Article 20 of the Constitution of Pakistan, contrary provisions have been enacted in the Pakistan Penal Code, which according to Section 298, which precludes this freedom to Ahmadis and any person professing the Ahmadi and 'in any manner ... outrages the religious feelings of Muslims,' are punishable with imprisonment of either three years or a fine. Further , although , the government of Pakistan has ratified the UN Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) which guarantees the right to freedom of thought religions and conscience , Pakistan has failed to enact domestic legislation nor let alone guarantee the right to freedom of conscience thought and religion, in its obligations to UN Convention.

I therefore, urge you recover the wife and child of Mr. Sharafat Din who have been detained by their family members as the punishment for changing the faith of Islam to Ahmadi. Allow them to decide freely about their faith. Please provide protection to Mr. Din and his family and take action against the family members of both the victims.

I also urge you as the government to adhere to the provisions of Article 20 of the Constitution of Pakistan which guarantees every citizen the right of professing a faith according to their choice. Urge also to take appropriate legal action against the officials of NADRA, Gilgit, for using coercive actions against Mr. Din.

Yours sincerely,

PLEASE SEND YOUR LETTERS TO:

1. Mr. Mamnoon Hussain
President of Pakistan
President's Secretariat
Islamabad
PAKISTAN
Fax: [+92 51 9207458](tel:+92519207458)
Email: publicmail@president.gov.pk

2. Mr. Mian Nawaz Sharif
Prime Minister
Prime Minister House
Islamabad
PAKISTAN
Fax: [+92 51 922 1596](tel:+92519221596)
E-mail: secretary@cabinet.gov.pk or pspm@pmsectt.gov.pk

3. Mr. Syed Mehdi Shah
Chief Minister of Gigit Baktistan
Chief Minister's Secretariat, Gilgit
PAKISTAN
Tel: [+92 5811 920573](tel:+925811920573)
Fax: +92 5811 50 201
Email: info@ gilgitbaltistan.gov.pk

4. Mr. Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan
Federal Minister for Interior
R Block, Pak Secretariat
Islamabad
PAKISTAN
Fax: [+92 51 9202624](tel:+92519202624)
Email: interior.complaintcell@gmail.com or ministry.interior@gmail.com

5. Mr. Pervez Rashid
Federal Minister
Ministry of Law, Justice and Human Rights
Old US Aid building
Ata Turk Avenue, G-5, Islamabad
PAKISTAN
Fax: [+92 51 9204108](tel:+92519204108)
Email: sarfraz_yousuf@yahoo.com

6. Dr. Faqir Hussain
Registrar of the Supreme Court of Pakistan
Constitution Avenue, Islamabad
PAKISTAN
Fax: [+92 51 9213452](tel:+92519213452)
Email: mail@supremecourt.gov.pk

7. Mr. Syed Ata ur Rehman
Secretary
Gilgit-Baltistan Secretariat, Gilgit
Ph: 0092 5811 920208
Fax: 0092 5811 920209
Email: info@gilgitbaltistan.gov.pk

Thank you.

Urgent Appeals Programme

Asian Human Rights Commission (ua@ahrc.asia)

Pakistani Muslim NGO highlights forced conversion of Christian women

World Watch Monitor (09.06.2014) / https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2014/06/article_3177184.html - A Pakistani Muslim NGO says that every year between 100 to 700 Christian women, "usually between the ages of 12 and 25 are abducted, converted to Islam, and married to the abductor or third party".

In its investigative report "Forced Marriages & Forced Conversions in the Christian Community of Pakistan" the Movement for Solidarity and Peace (MSP), identifies a pattern. It says that in most of these abduction cases the parents of Christian victims file a police report, but in response the abductor's relatives or friends file another police complaint on behalf of the abducted Christian woman, claiming that she wilfully married and converted to Islam, and that her parents are now "harassing" her unlawfully.

Of Pakistan's approximate 185 million population, about 95% are Muslims - 20-30% Shia, the majority Sunni. Christians account for about 2 per cent of the total population and about the same number are Hindus. The last 1% are of other religious minorities. [The MSP represents the Hazara community \(http://www.msp-pk.org\)](http://www.msp-pk.org), a distinct Turkic ethnic group from the areas bordering Afghanistan (in which country they

make up 13% of the population). They belong to the Shiite branch of Islam and are treated with suspicion. In Pakistan, Hazaras have lost thousands of their people in the last two decades in sectarian killings. Being itself subjected to violence and discrimination, the MSP confirms similar treatment meted out to Christians.

The report notes that after abduction, these Christian women are subjected to "sexual violence, rape, forced prostitution, human trafficking and sale, or other domestic abuse" so when produced before the court and asked to testify if they were abducted, these women (and sometimes children) give a statement in favour of their captors for fear of threats to their life, and those of their family.

MSP says the report is based on field research compiled by legal expert Emad Ansari during the summer of 2012; it includes numerous interviews with local CSOs, national policymakers and diverse stakeholders from amongst the Pakistani judiciary.

Backing up MSP's research, the respected national Pakistani daily paper 'Dawn' has also presented an investigation of such an incident: [a Hindu girl](#) whose parents filed a police complaint about her forced conversion. Hindus also suffer abduction of their women and forcible conversion to Islam. The investigation shows that it is quite difficult to actually say whether the marriage was contracted with complete wilful consent. (See also World Watch Monitor's recent report from Turkey).

Similarly, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) 2014 report also alludes to forced conversion of [Christian women](#) in Pakistan and notes abduction of a 14-year-old Christian who was forcibly converted to Islam and then given in marriage to her captor.

This USCIRF report notes that Pakistani Christians are a struggling and socio-economically marginalized group, of which about 80 per cent lead life in abject poverty. Because of their small number and poor status they "are subjected to human trafficking and sale through debt transfers, physical abuse, and economic exploitation." In this situation, the exploitation of Christian women is much easier and the crimes go unpunished with impunity.

The report does not rule out wilful conversions due to socio-economic reasons. "Social and economic disparities and poverty remain a major reason for wilful conversions from Christianity to Islam" the report says. It notes the role of social pressure for upward mobility by 'conversion'.

The National Commission for Justice and Peace, a Catholic organization working in Pakistan, recorded 624 media reports of Christians' conversion to Islam between the years 2000 and 2012. The MSP comments that, from these media reports, it is difficult to find out how many conversions were of a coercive nature. However, it notes that "The line between wilful and coerced conversions becomes further blurred when the reasons for conversion include a need for security, escape from discrimination, or fear of future violence". (Life can clearly appear to be easier for women who marry 'above their station' through conversion). However, the MSP report stresses that "coercive evangelization and targeted conversions are taking place".

Talking to World Watch Monitor, Albert David, the chairman of the Pakistan United Christian Movement, stressed that the government should take measures to stop forced conversion. He also appealed to the chief justice of Pakistan to take action if the government fails to introduce special measures.

"Forced Marriages & Forced Conversions in the [Christian Community of Pakistan](#)"

http://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/msp/pages/162/attachments/original/1396724215/MSP_Report_-_Forced_Marriages_and_Conversions_of_Christian_Women_in_Pakistan.pdf?1396724215

Pakistani blasphemy law used against popular TV channel, Jehovah's Witnesses and more

'Blasphemy' charges spread like wildfire

World Watch Monitor (27.05.2014) / https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2014/05/article_3156846.html/ - With several Christians on trial awaiting potential death sentences for allegedly committing blasphemy - tensions are increasingly high across the nation with a record breaking amount of blasphemy charges being waged against both non-Muslims and Muslims alike.

Commonly known as the blasphemy law, Pakistan's Penal Code Section 295C's death penalty went into effect in 1986 for the "use of derogatory remarks in respect of the [Islam's] Holy Prophet". In 1990, the Federal Shari'ah Court ruled that the penalty should be a mandatory death sentence, with no right to a pardon.

May 2014 is especially unique with regards to this law, because never before has it caused so much upheaval as has been witnessed this month.

On Saturday May 17th, three cases of blasphemy were registered in different parts of the country. The first was against a small group of Jehovah's Witnesses arrested for handing out their organisation's Watchtower leaflets; the second was against a 20-year-old Muslim youth for allegedly setting the Qur'an, Islam's sacred book, on fire and the third was against Pakistan's biggest media tycoon, Mir Shakeel-ur-Rehman, a morning show host, a film actress and her husband for allegedly airing a show with blasphemous content on the nation's Geo TV morning show titled "Utho Jago Pakistan" (Get up, Wake up, Pakistan).

The four Jehovah Witnesses — Javed Younus, his wife Nazia Javed, Sri Lankan national Carol David and Rose Marry — were arrested for distributing Watchtower outreach leaflets in a Christian colony in Mirpurkhas.

Talking to World Watch Monitor, Jam Zaffar, the Senior Superintendent of Police of Pakistan Railways in Mirpurkhas, said the distribution of Watchtower leaflets was noticed by a member of Ahle Sunnat wa-al Jamaat (ASWJ), considered one of the most violent organisations carrying out terrorist activities inside Pakistan, who responded by alerting other ASWJ activists to the scene which resulted in the group of four being surrounded by hundreds of protestors.

Zaffar said the protestors were especially angry, so there was fear of violence and bloodshed.

Francis Khokhar, who is legally representing the group, told World Watch Monitor, "as soon as I came to know that the police have taken them in custody without formally registering a complaint, I filed a [motion for] habeas corpus."

Pastor Samson Shukardin also spoke to World Watch Monitor, saying, "after the police had registered the case, they were unsure about Jehovah's Witnesses because they knew only about Protestant and Catholic branches of Christianity."

The three women were released on bail, but Younus was sent to jail.

Zaffar said that during the process ASWJ had surrounded the police station. "They seemed to have planned to halt the city and descent to violence," he said.

Jehovah's Witnesses are a sect established in 1870, in Pennsylvania. The Watchtower Society was started by Charles Taze Russell. Jehovah's Witnesses refer to themselves as Christians, but their beliefs differ from those of orthodox Christians, who do not consider them to be Christian, since there are many inconsistencies in their beliefs alongside fundamental teachings of the faith.

On the same day, but 900 kilometres northeast of Mirpurkhas, a 20-year-old Muslim youth allegedly set the Qur'an ablaze.

In a fit of anger, Nazir Ahmed set the book on fire in Arifwala. His mother was furious and cried out for help; neighbours gathered and started to beat him. He was reported to have been beaten so severely he was close to death, but police intervened and took Ahmed into custody.

Elsewhere in Pakistan, on the same day, the media tycoon Mir Shakeel-ur-Rehman, the morning show host Shaista Lodhi, film actress Veena Malik, and her husband Assad Khattak Khan, were charged with allegedly airing a blasphemous show on Geo TV.

Three days before, Geo TV channel's morning show had aired the re-enactment of the actress Malik and her husband's marriage. During this re-enactment, a Sufi song was sung that captures marriage between Ali, the fourth caliph of Islam, and the Islamic Prophet Muhammad's daughter Fatima.

Presenting Malik as a bride while the religious song was played infuriated many Pakistanis. Other private TV channels repeatedly telecast the program, further fuelling anger toward Geo TV, which receives nearly half of Pakistan's viewership and is often dubbed as foreign-funded and called 'Jew' TV rather than 'Geo' TV.

The Margala Police Station registered a case against them under the blasphemy and anti-terrorism laws. The Sunni Ittehad Council, an organization that represents 160 million Pakistani Sunni Muslims, separately started a petition on Saturday against the TV show presenters in the Supreme Court.

Muslim attorneys are no longer safe

The country does have some natives who are trying to fight the abuse of blasphemy prosecution, at the risk of their own lives.

On May 7, a prominent human rights lawyer, Rashid Rehman, representing a teacher accused of blasphemy in Multan, about 550 kilometres southwest of Islamabad, was murdered.

Rehman is the first lawyer to be killed for taking on a blasphemy case.

Rehman was shot by gunmen posing as clients in his office for representing Junaid Hafeez, an English professor arrested in March 2013 after being accused by his students for insulting the Prophet Mohammed on Facebook.

Hafeez had been in prison for nearly a year before Rehman agreed to represent him; his case became one of Rehman's 228 blasphemy cases, including Sherry Rehman, who was Pakistan's Ambassador to the United States when charged with defaming Islam.

Rehman joins a list of Pakistanis killed while opposing the country's widely popular anti-blasphemy laws. Two elected officials, Salmaan Taseer and Shahbaz Bhatti, were killed while trying to pass an amendment in the Penal Code to end abuse of the laws.

The U.S. State Department and the Human Rights Watch have urged the Pakistani government to investigate Rehman's killing.

In a separate, May 14 incident, a criminal case of blasphemy was lodged against 68 Muslim lawyers. The lawyers were arrested for arranging a protest against a police officer who had illegally detained one of the group's colleagues.

The penalty for blasphemy in Pakistan is death, though no one convicted under the law has been executed. Most are freed on appeal, often to face mob justice. Several people are thought to have been murdered while on trial, and more than 50 have been murdered in extrajudicial killings.

The original blasphemy law dates back Britain's colonial rule over India, prior to the 1947 partition that created Pakistan. It was intended to prevent Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs from using provocative religious language against each other.

However, under Pakistani President Zia-ul-Haq, in power from 1987-1988, the law was changed to protect only the Sunni version of Islam. It has since increasingly become a pretext to pressure Pakistan's religious minorities.

Accused of blasphemy, man killed in police station

AsiaNews (17.05.2014) / <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Accused-of-blasphemy,-man-killed-in-police-station-31104.html> - A 15-year-old boy is the murderer. The issue began when the dead man complained against a shopkeeper who had displayed a sign with derogatory remarks about Ahmadis. The latter responded by filing a formal complaint.

Accused of blasphemy, Khalil Ahmad, 65, was killed yesterday by gunshots inside a police station by a 15-year-old boy, in Sharaqpur village, near Lahore, Punjab.

The incident began when Ahmad and three other people complained to a shopkeeper who had displayed a sign with derogatory comments about Ahmadis, an Islamic minority considered heretical by mainstream Muslims.

The shopkeeper refused to comply and after a heated argument made a formal complaint of blasphemy against Khalil Ahmed. Arrested last Tuesday, the father of four was taken to Sharaqpur police station.

Yesterday evening, a young man presented himself to police, asked to see Ahmad, and as the latter approached, shot him. He was arrested by police.

The incident is yet another example of the 'black law' at work adopted in 1986 by then dictator Zia-ul-Haq to satisfy the Islamist demands.

The 'law' imposes life in prison or the death sentence on anyone who desecrates the Qur'an or insults the name of the prophet Muhammad.

As a result, religious minorities are constantly intimidated, including Ahmadis. Formally declared as 'non-Muslims' in 1984, many of them have been arrested for reading verses of the Qur'an or having them engraved on rings. In 2010, 86 of them were killed in two simultaneous attacks in Lahore.

Over the years, the so-called black law has come to be used as a tool to settle personal scores or to use in business disputes. It has also been used to seize assets that belong to members of religious minorities. Indeed, the number of cases has grown exponentially, from one in 2001 to 80 in 2011.

In many cases, like that of Khalil Ahmad, disputes end in murder. Just last week for example, lawyer Rashid Rehman Khan, a prominent human rights advocate involved in the legal defence of a university professor accused of blasphemy, was himself shot dead.

On a previous occasion, he had been threatened in a courtroom by fellow lawyers.

Likewise, earlier in the week, 68 lawyers were accused of blasphemy in Jhang District, Punjab. Mostly Shia, the lawyers had taken to the streets to protest against the police for arresting without reason one of their colleagues.

As a result of the rally, the lawyers were accused of insulting the name of a close relative of Muhammad in what is for all intents and purposes a bitter dispute between police and members of the legal profession.

Following the latest incidents, human rights organisations Life for All Pakistan and the Masih Foundation have announced intention to stage protest rallies in Lahore to express solidarity with the Ahmadi community.

For Fr John Aslam, a clergyman from the Diocese of Lahore, what happened to Khalil Ahmad was tragic, the third blasphemy case in two weeks.

The victim, the priest, said "was falsely accused and fell prey to the extremist mind-set. A teenager killed without even asking whether he had committed blasphemy or not. A simple discussion over blasphemy led to an extreme reaction. The man was in police custody. Not letting the courts decide the fate of defendants and taking the law in your hands in the name of religion is insanity."

Even Muslim scholar Abid Ali condemned the incident, saying that "this case shows that the police is helpless and [that it] failed to protect an accused. Killing an innocent in the name of religion is unacceptable. Religious minorities have the right to practice their beliefs".

Offence against any religion comes under blasphemy law

APP (13.05.2014) - Chief Justice of Pakistan Tassaduq Hussain Jilani on Tuesday remarked that according to Pakistan Penal Code's Article 295, offence against any religion comes under the blasphemy law while expressing annoyance for non-registration of cases against culprits involved in setting Hindu temples ablaze in Sindh.

He expressed these remarks while chairing a three-member bench in a suo motu case over Peshawar Church bombing and rights of minorities.

The chief justice announced that due to importance of the case, the court would appoint amicus curiae including Munir A. Malik, Khawaja Haris and Hassan Aurangzaib who would assist the court in the matter without charging any fee.

He also directed the minorities representatives to submit a report which indicates sections where the material has been used to abuse the minorities and identify areas where law enforcing agencies failed to secure their lives and property.

Justice Jilani said that the court would share grievances of the minorities, hinting establishment of a new force to safeguard the minority communities.

Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) MNA Dr Ramesh Kumar apprised the court that during last two months six untoward incidents happened with the Hindu community where their temples were set ablaze and their religion was not properly honoured and miscreants were not brought to book.

He said that four of the incidents come under the blasphemy law.

Additional Inspector General (AIG) Sindh Police Ali Sher Jhakrani informed the court that the police has arrested five suspected criminals involved in torturing people belonging to minorities but cases were not registered under the blasphemy law.

The chief justice directed him to submit a detailed report over the action taken by police in this context within a week.

The court also directed Advocate General Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to submit a detailed report over the Hindu samadhi in Karak district.

Salim Michael, a member of Justice Helpline informed the court that Young Man Christian Association is a prestigious institution based in Karachi. He complained that the building was being misused by some people and the matter was subjudice in the Sindh High Court (SHC) for a while.

He said the SHC had appointed a 'Nazir' – a court official who serves processes, acts as treasurer, and performs other similar duties – to look after the affairs of the club till final decision.

Dr Ramesh Kumar apprised the court that according to the Liaqat-Nehru pact, the chairman of the evacuee property trust should be a Hindu.

On this, the chief justice remarked that the political situation among the two nations was not good so that the accord was not implemented on both sides but the apex court is trying to facilitate them on humanitarian grounds.

During the hearing, the chief justice also hailed the role of Indian Supreme Court for the welfare of minorities in India.

Later, the court adjourned the hearing for one week.

Pakistan's Hindus, other minorities face surge of violence

By Syed Raza Hassan

Reuters (06.05.2014) - Rahim Yar Khan, Pakistan - The mob arrived at around midnight, brandishing clubs. They smashed statues, looted gold artefacts and then set the Hindu temple in Pakistan ablaze.

An accusation of blasphemy sparked the attack in the town of Larkana, human rights activists said, part of a spike in violence against Hindus in predominately Muslim Pakistan.

March was the worst month for attacks on Hindus in 20 years with five temples attacked, up from nine during the whole of 2013, said Life for All, a Pakistani rights group. But it's not just Hindus who feel victimised.

All of Pakistan's minorities - Hindus, Christians, Ahmadis and even Shi'ite Muslims - feel that the state fails to protect them, and even tolerates violence against them.

Many complain the problem has become worse since Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, who is seen as more conservative and indulgent of Islamists than his predecessor, came to power last year.

This raises questions about the state's pledge to rein in the militants who launch attacks into India and Afghanistan. The neighbours say the extremists act with the complicity of Pakistan's security agencies. Islamabad denies that

Non-Muslims make up a small fraction of the 180 million people in nuclear-armed Pakistan.

Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the hero of the country's creation as a haven for the sub-continent's Muslims, ushered in independence in 1947 with a promise to minorities that they would enjoy freedom of worship and equality without discrimination.

But for many members of Pakistan's minorities those words ring hollow.

The U.S. Commission on Religious Freedom said in a recent report that conditions in Pakistan had "hit an all-time low" and governments had failed to adequately protect minorities and arrest perpetrators of crimes against them.

"Pakistan is increasingly failing to protect its minorities for two broad reasons: principally, rising religious intolerance and the space ceded to violent ideologies," said Sherry

Rehman, who was a government minister and ambassador to the United States under the previous Pakistani administration.

The security establishment has used Islamists for decades, against political opponents at home and to pursue aims in Afghanistan and against old rival India. But some militants, like the Pakistani Taliban, have turned on the state since Pakistan joined the U.S.-led war on militancy.

The government launched peace talks with the Taliban in February and rights activists fear that they and other militants have been emboldened by the talks to step up attacks on their minority-group enemies.

Activists also say the tolerance of militancy provides cover for opportunist attacks by those who just want to grab land, homes or businesses of minority neighbours under the guise of religion.

Hindus and members of other minorities say the situation has worsened since Sharif won an election last year. Sharif has close ties with Saudi Arabia, whose brand of conservative Wahhabi Islam is preached by many of the people who denounce minorities.

Saudi Arabia, the centre of Sunni Islam, sees Pakistan as a bulwark against Shi'ite Muslim Iran and it has long supported hardliners in Pakistan. It recently gave the country a gift of \$1.5 billion.

"Impunity"

Whatever the cause of the surge of violence and abuse, many Pakistani Hindus in the richest province of Punjab are feeling beleaguered and increasingly looking to get out. More than 100 families are leaving for India each month, rights groups say.

Among those who have gone were Munawar Jee's brothers and their families after his married sister was kidnapped last year. Her abductors got her certified as a Muslim convert and re-married her off the next day. Recanting Islam would mean she could legally be put to death.

"Losing my sister is the biggest regret of my life," Jee told Reuters at his shoe shop in Punjab's Rahim Yar Khan district. He said he would soon join his family in India.

Hindus say their women are easy targets for rape or forced marriage. Temples are attacked and looted. Accusations of blasphemy, punishable by death, are increasingly being used to drive Hindus from their homes, they say.

Punjab, the prime minister's heartland, had until recently been a refuge for Hindus compared with some other areas.

But the province has also become a power base for militant groups, many of which have been nurtured by the security agencies and appeased by the politicians seeking votes.

"The militant groups work with impunity as they enjoy support from the state functionaries. They cannot work without some level of support," said veteran rights campaigner I.A. Rehman.

If the militants' treatment of minorities can be seen as a reflection of the state's acceptance of the groups, then people hoping the security forces will follow through on

government vows to crack down on those responsible for violence would seem wise to be cautious.

"It is difficult to say if the security establishment has come out of its 'good Taliban'/'bad Taliban' mindset," said prominent lawyer and human rights campaigner Asma Jahangir, referring to the military's propensity to accept some groups while fighting others.

Federal Information Minister Pervaiz Rashid did not return calls seeking comment on policy towards minorities. A Punjab government spokesman rejected the suggestion that authorities were not doing enough to help Hindus.

"The government is committed to protect its religious minorities," said Shoaib Bin Aziz, adding he was not aware of an increase of Hindus leaving. He denied that the provincial government was soft on militancy.

"Terrorists are not friends of anyone," he said. "The Punjab government does not have soft corner for any terrorist organisation."

Hindu activist Kirshan Sharma said such reassurances meant little. The government was talking to the Taliban but refused to protect Hindus, he said.

"Pakistan has kneeled before the Taliban by holding talks," Sharma said. "What hope can Hindus see in the country's future?"

Briton jailed in Pakistan for 'posing as Muslim' tells of ordeal

By Athat Ahmad

BBC News (25.04.2014) - A British man jailed for "posing as a Muslim", has spoken for the first time since returning to the UK.

Masud Ahmad, 73, was arrested in Pakistan in November under blasphemy laws but fled while on bail.

The 73-year-old is part of the minority Ahmadiyya sect, who are considered heretics in Pakistan.

They were declared non-Muslim in 1974 by the Pakistan government because of their belief in a subservient prophet after Muhammad.

One of the restrictions on their religious freedom is that they cannot publicly recite the Koran.

Late last year, a young man posing as a patient visited Mr Ahmad at his homeopathy clinic in Lahore, before asking questions about religion.

"I have no business talking about religious beliefs when I am working, I am only here to help people. But he kept pushing the topic into matters about Islam", Mr Ahmad said.

The man then used a mobile phone to secretly film Mr Ahmad reading the Koran and called the police to have him arrested.

Educated in Britain, Mr Ahmad first came to the UK in the 1960s, where he set up his own watch repair business, before returning to Pakistan in 1982.

The grandfather-of-nine, now living with his children in Glasgow, was placed in a jail with other prisoners also charged under the country's blasphemy law.

He said: "It was a small cell, 8ft by about 12ft and within it a toilet. We had to sleep on the floor. The temperature was almost minus one degree in the night."

About 400 people protested outside the police station in which Mr Ahmad was being held, demanding to see him.

Small suitcase

He said: "They were shouting and chanting, 'let us kill him, let us kill him'. But I wasn't scared."

Members of the Ahmadiyya community helped Mr Ahmad flee the country after he was granted bail at a third attempt.

It is understood no travel restrictions were put in place by police and as a dual Pakistani-British national, he was able to return to the UK.

Escaping the country quickly meant he was only able to take one small suitcase and the prayer hat he was wearing when arrested.

"I'm still a wanted man in Pakistan as I was only given bail. Ahmadis are treated like animals, I can't go back. The Mullahs (religious clerics) are grinding their teeth, wondering how I could escape them," he said.

"Ahmadis can be jailed for up to three years in Pakistan for referring to their faith as Islam, preaching or "outraging the religious feelings of Muslims."

The country has a history of taking claims of blasphemy particularly seriously.

Last month, a Christian road sweeper was sentenced to death after being convicted of using derogatory remarks against the Prophet Muhammad in a row with a Muslim friend.

In 2011, the governor of Pakistan's Punjab province, Salman Taseer, was killed after being shot by one of his bodyguards.

Many were angered by the 66-year-old's defence of Asia Bibbi, a Christian woman sentenced to death under the country's blasphemy law.

As a result of such incidents, Mr Ahmad's 20-year-old granddaughter, Madiha, was concerned about how her grandfather had been coping in prison.

She said: "He'd been recovering from cancer, he's 73 years old. A jail like that is no place for someone like him to be. We were over here and so didn't know how he was."

The university student said she had also suffered discrimination in Pakistan because of her religious beliefs, but believed that things would one day change.

"They are going to pay for this, of course they are. Because they are just doing bad to people who have done nothing to them. We have never said one word of hatred to them," she said.

Having returned to the UK after 32 years, Mr Ahmad is now trying to establish a new life for himself in Scotland.

"Glasgow's nice. The weather's sometimes hard to get used to - it rains, then it's sunny, then it rains again. But it is a very nice place", he said.

"Pakistan is my motherland and you will always love your mother. But I have a freedom here which is very essential. I love my country but I can't go back. If I go back, I will be put in prison or murdered."

Ahmadi newspaper case: Four Ahmadis asked to record statements

The Express Tribune (23.04.2014) / <http://tribune.com.pk/story/699094/ahmadi-newspaper-case-four-ahmadis-asked-to-record-statements/> - A judge of the Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) on Tuesday ordered that statements of four men accused of distributing a daily newspaper of the Ahmadi community, which allegedly contained blasphemous content, should be recorded on April 26.

The four are among six Ahmadis facing charges under Sections 295-B (defiling or desecration of a copy of the Holy Quran) and 298-C (an Ahmadi posing as a Muslim) of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) and Section 11-W of the Anti-Terrorism Act in a case registered with the Islampura police station.

The complainant had accused the Ahmadis of printing and distributing Jamaat-i-Ahmadiyya's community newspaper Al-Fazal, which he had claimed carried blasphemous content.

He had stated in his complaint that Khalid Ashfaq was president of the Ahmadi organisation in Kareem Park and had been distributing Al-Fazal amongst people, even though the Home Department had banned the newspaper in October 2011. The police were informed and had taken Khalid Ashfaq and Tahir Ahmed into custody when they were distributing copies of the newspaper. A printing press was also raided where allegedly blasphemous material was printed. The police later arrested Faisal Ahmed and Azhar Zareef. All four had been freed on bail. Daily Al-Fazal editor Abdul Sami and another accused Tahir Mehdi have not been arrested so far and have been declared proclaimed offenders.

The four accused who were granted bail said in the court that none of the charges under the penal provisions invoked against them had been proven.

They said that the complainant had a grudge against them simply because they were Ahmadis. The counsel for complainant contended that the accused had committed the cited offences by distributing a banned newspaper, which he said contained blasphemous material.

Pakistani couple get death sentences for blasphemy

BBC News (05.04.2014) - A Pakistani Christian couple have been sentenced to death for blasphemy after allegedly sending a text message insulting the Prophet Muhammad.

The couple, named as Shafqat Emmanuel and Shagufta Kausar, were found guilty of sending the text message to the imam of their local mosque.

Allegations of blasphemy against Islam are taken very seriously in Pakistan.

Several recent cases have prompted international concern about the application of blasphemy laws.

The imam brought a complaint against the couple last July.

The couple's lawyer told the BBC he would appeal against the sentences and said the trial had not been conducted fairly.

Pakistan has a de facto moratorium on the death penalty so it is unlikely the couple will be executed.

They come from the town of Gojra in Punjab, previously the scene of communal violence.

In 2009 the rumoured desecration of a copy of the Koran led to a mob burning nearly 40 houses and a church in Gojra. At least eight members of Christian community died in the violence.

Minorities targeted

Since the 1990s, scores of Christians have been convicted for desecrating the Koran or blaspheming against the Prophet Mohammed.

While most of them have been sentenced to death by the lower courts, many sentences have been overturned due to lack of evidence.

Critics argue that Pakistan's blasphemy laws are frequently misused to settle personal scores and that members of minority groups are also unfairly targeted.

Muslims constitute a majority of those prosecuted, followed by the minority Ahmadi community.

In 2012 the arrest of a young Christian girl, Rimsha Masih, on blasphemy charges provoked international outrage. After being detained in a high security prison for several weeks she was eventually released and her family subsequently fled to Canada.

Pakistani Christian sentenced to death for blasphemy

By Asif Aqeel

World Watch Monitor (29.03.2014) - A year after Muslims devastated the predominantly Christian Joseph Colony; the man at the center of the controversy has been sentenced to death for blasphemy because of claims that he insulted the Prophet Mohammed.

Sawan Masih's sentence, handed down March 27, is based on a conversation that occurred between him and his Muslim friend in March 2013. Two days after the conversation, Masih's residence in Joseph Colony was pillaged by more than 3,000 angry Muslims, who looted and torched Christian homes, shops and churches displacing hundreds of families.

Masih's trial was conducted in the Lahore Camp Jail, a place he's been unable to leave due to severe danger to his life. Judge Chaudhry Ghulam Murtaza sentenced Masih to death and fined him 200,000 Pakistani Rupee, or roughly US \$2,000.

Pakistan has never carried out an execution for blasphemy, which it defines as "the act of insulting or showing contempt or lack of reverence for God." The ruling was issued on the same day the U.S. released a report naming Pakistan as the leading country for imprisoning people for blasphemy.

"There are no procedural safeguards, making the law ripe for abuse," said the report by the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, an advisory body to Congress. "[I]ndividuals accused of blasphemy have been murdered in vigilante violence. Mere allegations often serve as an accelerant in combustible situations, resulting in mob attacks or violence that undermines Pakistan's stability and empowers extremists. Despite the law's rampant abuse and lack of procedural safeguards, Pakistan's Federal Sharia Court recently ruled that the death penalty should be the sole penalty for blasphemy," the report said.

Masih's attorney, Naeem Shakir, told World Watch Monitor an appeal is being filed to the Lahore High Court, which must sign off on death penalty cases. He said the conviction was not based on justice especially since the state has failed to prosecute those accused of destroying Joseph Colony.

"Those charged with terrorism, mob violence and blasphemy are released on bail, but Masih has been convicted and awarded the death penalty despite the lack of proper evidence," Shakir said. According to the New York Times, Masih released a statement insisting "that he had been falsely charged as part of a plot by businessmen to use blasphemy allegations to drive Christians from the land in Joseph Colony so that it could be seized for industrial use. They hatched a conspiracy to push out the residents of the colony. They contrived a case and got it filed by a person who was close to me. I am innocent."

WWM has been unable to verify the statement's origin.

A key part of the evidence provided by Muslim witnesses and the complainant said Masih told his Muslim friend, "My Jesus is genuine. He is Son of Allah (Allah forbid). He will return while your Prophet is false. My Jesus is true and will give salvation."

However, this claim against Masih, stating that he called Jesus the 'Son of Allah,' on the night he allegedly blasphemed against Islam has raised questions, as the vast majority of Christians, aside from those in Malaysia, do not use the word 'Allah' to refer to God.

The Joseph Colony, surrounded by steel mills, has been inhabited by Christian residents for 40 years. The residents settled the area after being evicted from another location and have never owned it as most of the people are poor and able to find only menial labor given their minority Christian status.

On the morning of the Joseph Colony attack, Muslim groups from the nearby factories Workers' Union went on strike for Masih's arrest. The police assured the Christians in the colony that an attack would be averted if Masih was turned into their station, so he was handed over. The following day, however, a mob attacked the colony, sending hundreds of Christians fleeing their homes.

After the incident, police registered a case of mob violence, terrorism and of blasphemy against more than 1,000 people, whom the state has yet to prosecute. All have been released on bail.

Witnesses said the mob was led by political leaders [Malik Riaz, Asad Ashraf, Ghazali Butt and Saleem Mughal](#) of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz, which once governed the region and now is the country's largest political force after winning national elections in May 2013, but none of them were arrested.

Pakistani university refuses prosperous work to Christians

Christians offered only menial jobs despite legal efforts to eradicate discrimination

World Watch Monitor (17.03.2014) - A public university in Pakistan defies court orders and misleads government authorities to avoid giving federally approved jobs to non-Muslims, a Christian politician in the nation's ruling party says.

In May 2009 the Federal government passed a law requiring 5% of jobs to be allocated to religious minorities. The University of Sargodha (located in the Punjab province, where most of the country's Christians reside) has hired hundreds of employees since this legislation was implemented in Punjab in 2010, but continues to use bureaucratic tactics to avoid hiring non-Muslims, according to Chaudhry Mustaq Gill, a Christian political leader in the Pakistan Muslim League (N).

The legislation was created to protect religious minorities and minimise injustice for people applying for government jobs, but state officials are the main hurdle to its implementation. The legislation was initiated by Shahbaz Bhatti, a Christian MP who was assassinated three years ago. He had been a prominent figure in the support of Asia Bibi (a Christian woman sentenced to death for allegedly insulting the Prophet Mohammed) and for seeking amendments to Pakistan's blasphemy laws.

Pakistan is an Islamic state with 95-98% of the population practicing Islam, while the remainder of the population primarily practices other religions such as Hinduism, Christianity and Sikhism.

Chaudhry Mushtaq Gill filed a case against the university through the Punjab government ombudsman in September 2012. The university lost the case and the ombudsman decreed the following in May 2013:

"The University of Sargodha had various advertisements for recruitment after March 2010 without prescribing [the] 5% quota for the minorities, which violates the provisions of policy instructions ... Maladministration of the Agency is established."

According to Gill, nearly one year has passed since this was ordered and the university has not rectified its wrongdoing.

The record provided by the university to the ombudsman verifies that 102 of 111 Christians hired since 2010 are working as street sweepers. The nine remaining Christians are primarily working as clerks and gardeners, with one working as a storekeeper and the other as a laboratory attendant.

The occupation of street sweeping is traditionally considered menial and degrading under the Indian caste system; hence, only "untouchables" are given jobs in this category.

"Untouchability" is a social-religious practice rooted in the Indian caste system that ostracizes minority groups by segregating them from the majority of society. Pakistani Muslims still observe the caste system due to having lived in close proximity with Hindus for hundreds of years. Christians are mostly considered to come from the untouchable class, so they are expected to work in menial jobs like those of street sweeping in both the public and private sectors.

Speaking to World Watch Monitor, Gill said the affirmative action by the government was being rendered meaningless. "During the proceedings before the ombudsman, the university officials stated that the quota does not apply to high-ranking jobs like that of teaching, but the notification clearly states that it applies to all posts across the board."

Gill further added that the University of Sargodha was not the only university ignoring the minorities quota. "There are dozens of other universities. I am seeking the same directions from the Punjab government ombudsman [regarding these] and some have agreed to implement the quota as well," he said.

Church of Pakistan college Principal beaten, told to leave

By ACNS staff

ACNS (10.03.2014) - The Principal of Edwardes College in Peshawar, Pakistan, has revealed he was beaten by 'intelligence agents' who destroyed his visa and warned him to leave the country.

The Revd Titus Presler, College Principal since 2011, said there has been increasing pressure from the provincial government to take over control of the college.

Founded in 1900 by the Church Missionary Society as the first institution of higher education on the northeast frontier with Afghanistan, Edwardes is today the only college owned and managed by the Church of Pakistan.

There are, however, those who wish to change that.

"In December, Bishop Humphrey, some of my colleagues and I received threatening visits, followed by instigated demonstrations," said Mr Presler.

"Then on February 14, while starting on a drive to Islamabad with Muslim friends, I was accosted by men who identified themselves as intelligence agents at the motorway toll plaza in Peshawar and hustled [me] into another vehicle where they pounded me with their fists, destroyed my visa and warned me to leave the country."

Ninety percent of faculty and students at the Church of Pakistan-run college are Muslims, with 9 per cent Christians, and 1 per cent Hindus and Sikhs. Mr Presler believes that this means the Church "has a unique role to play in offering educational excellence and fostering inter-religious harmony in a polarised society."

In the article, published on the website of Virginia Theological Seminary's Center for Anglican Communion Studies, Mr Presler added that in such difficult times it is "the

prayers and letter of Christians around the world sent to the Bishop and me [that] sustain us."

Read the full article at <http://www.vts.edu/anglicancommentary>

Pakistan poised to make death penalty compulsory for 'blasphemy'

CNS News (31.01.2014) - Pakistan's government faces a looming deadline to either comply with a court ruling to amend the country's penal code to make the death penalty the only lawful punishment for "blasphemy," or to appeal the order. And with just four days to go, its failure to respond is worrying religious freedom campaigners.

The early December ruling by the federal shari'a court threatens to worsen an already grim situation faced by religious minorities. Currently those convicted of "defiling the name of Mohammed" face either life imprisonment or the death penalty, but the court wants the latter option to now be compulsory.

The court intervention comes amid growing calls around the world for the controversial blasphemy laws – often cited as the root cause of violence against Christians – to be repealed altogether, but Pakistani politicians have shown no willingness to take any step that would infuriate radical Muslims.

The federal shari'a court (FSC) is empowered under Pakistan's constitution to decide whether any law is "repugnant to the injunctions of Islam." Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's government now has until February 4 to amend the penal code in line with the court's order, or appeal.

Reaction to the current situation has been particularly strong in former colonial power Britain, where churches are urging the Pakistani government not to comply with the court order.

"We think many of us, both within and without Pakistan, recognize that there has been considerable misuse of the blasphemy laws in recent years," heads of the Methodist Church wrote in a letter to Pakistani and British authorities. "Minorities and vulnerable people have been targeted and personal scores have been settled, quite contrary to the real intention of the law."

"If this order is accepted by the government, achieving justice for those accused of blasphemy will be an even more difficult task."

The moderator of the Church of Scotland, which has a long history in South Asia, said in a letter to the Pakistani and British governments it was concerned about the blasphemy laws' use and abuse "to settle scores, exact revenge or inflame religious extremism," and noted that half of those charged under the laws since 1988 have been non-Muslims, even though they make up just two percent of the population.

The church expressed concern about the implications of the FSC ruling, and reiterated earlier calls for the blasphemy law to be abolished in its entirety, arguing that it "goes against the traditions and teachings of Islam, and is at odds with the culture of the majority of Pakistanis."

Concerns about the court ruling go beyond the mandatory death penalty aspect. The Center for Legal Aid, Assistance and Settlement (CLAAS), an organization that opposes the blasphemy law and provides legal assistance to Pakistani Christians, says that if the government complies with the court ruling, that will give shari'a courts jurisdiction over blasphemy cases in future.

"We all know the blasphemy laws are being misused to settle personal scores, and this will be taken to another height and victims from religious minorities will become defenseless and more vulnerable if it becomes shari'a law," said CLAAS director Nasir Saeed.

"There is a longstanding demand of the Islamists that blasphemy cases should be heard by the shari'a courts," he said. "The majority of ulemas [Muslim religious scholars] consider it a bigger sin than apostasy. There are even some who believe that there is no need to register a case against a blasphemer and that culprits should be punished on the spot, with it being the duty of every Muslim to ensure this is done."

According to Human Rights Watch at least 16 Pakistanis are currently on death row for blasphemy, while another 20 are serving life sentences. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan says 34 people were charged with blasphemy in 2013.

Although the government has yet to carry out an execution for blasphemy, dozens of people have been killed over the years, for instance by angry assailants or mobs, after being publicly accused. The National Commission for Justice and Peace, a Catholic body, lists at least 51 such deaths between 1990 and 2012.

Crucial test

The Obama administration has repeatedly criticized the blasphemy laws but has also overruled recommendations by the independent U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom to designate Pakistan as an egregious religious freedom violator under U.S. law.

The FSC first ruled that the death penalty be mandatory for blasphemy convictions more than two decades ago, during Sharif's previous tenure as prime minister.

The government at the time never implemented the ruling, and the court's decision last month arose from a contempt of court petition brought by a lawyer.

Patrick Sookhdeo, international director of Barnabas Fund, a charity working among minority Christians in Islamic countries, says Sharif's government appears to be sitting on the fence regarding the latest FSC order, "refusing either to accept or to resist the ruling publicly" – but cannot do so indefinitely.

"It is a crucial test of what kind of country Pakistan is going to become: a pariah state in which extremists are enabled to dominate through violence and oppression, or a progressive state in which people's rights and freedoms are upheld and the nation's aspirations are supported by other countries," he said.

Blasphemy law used against minorities in Pakistan

AP (29.01.2014) — The elderly man's troubles started when two young men milling inside his homeopathic clinic casually asked him about his religion. He thought they were merely curious. In fact, they belonged to an outlawed militant group and were carrying hidden tape recorders.

Within hours, police officers showed up at Masood Ahmad's clinic and played back the tape in which he explained the tenets of the minority Ahmadiyya sect, rejected by mainstream Muslims because it disputes the basic tenet of their faith that Muhammad is Islam's last prophet.

Ahmad, who returned from Britain to his Pakistani homeland decades ago to open the clinic, was charged with blasphemy — which can carry the death penalty. The 72 year old has been jailed since his arrest this month, awaiting a trial that could take months or even years to begin.

He is not alone. Just last week, a Pakistani court sentenced a mentally ill British man, Mohammad Asghar, to death on blasphemy charges after he allegedly claimed to be Islam's prophet.

Pakistan's blasphemy law is increasingly becoming a potent weapon in the arsenal of Muslim extremists. Although Pakistan has never executed anybody under the law, vigilantes frequently entrap and sometimes kill adherents of minority religions accused of blasphemy. They have created a climate of fear, forcing frightened judges into holding court sessions inside jails and keeping witnesses from coming to the defense of those on trial.

"At the moment, there are more and more pending blasphemy cases," said I.A. Rahman, one of Pakistan's leading human rights activists. "Extremist organizations demonstrate and raise slogans, and judges are afraid. They agitate all the time, creating hatred, and the government is not doing anything. Successive governments have failed."

The U.S.-based Human Rights Watch chastised Pakistan's record of protecting its religious minorities, saying in its 2014 world report that "abuses are rife under the country's abusive blasphemy law, which is used against religious minorities, often to settle personal disputes."

The federal religious affairs ministry refused to comment. Government officials did not return calls for comment.

Maulana Abdul Rauf Farooqi, secretary-general of Jamiat Ulma-e-Islam, an organization with close ties to many members of the Afghan Taliban's leadership, rejected allegations that the law is widely misused to settle personal disputes, though he said he supports a rigorous police investigation before charges are filed. He said those who were physically attacked had brought the violence upon themselves by enraging Muslims' sentiments.

According to the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, 34 people were charged with blasphemy last year. A government statistic says 27 were charged in 2012. At least 16 people are currently on death row for blasphemy, while another 20 are serving life sentences, according to Human Rights Watch.

"In the last three years we have seen a large increase in the number of cases of blasphemy," said Keith Davies, head of RescueChristians, a U.S.-based charity that started operations in Pakistan four years ago.

Pakistan's blasphemy law predates the founding of the country in 1947, but during the 1980s the U.S.-backed military dictator, Gen. Mohammed Zia-ul-Haq, amended it to add the death penalty and single out Islam as the religion that may not be insulted, among other changes.

Pakistan is not the only nation with such laws on the books. Blasphemy offenses are punishable in more than 30 countries, including some with predominantly Christian populations, such as Poland and Greece, as well as Muslim countries like Indonesia and Pakistan, according to a 2012 report by Rev. Chloe Breyer, executive director of the Interfaith Center of New York.

Most of Pakistan's 180 million people are Sunni Muslims who do not support the militants' violence or their abhorrence for religious minorities. Nevertheless, the minorities, including Muslims who belong to the Shiite sect of Islam, say even the smallest quarrel can land them in jail on trumped-up blasphemy charges.

Abbas Kamaili, a leading Shiite cleric, told The Associated Press that he supported the idea of a blasphemy law but criticized the Pakistani version as "ambiguous" and easily distorted by militant Sunnis who want to rid the country of Shiites.

The violence associated with Pakistan's blasphemy law has been brutal. Three years ago, liberal Gov. Salman Taseer was assassinated by his own guard after defending a Christian woman charged with blasphemy. In a separate attack, militants gunned down Minority Affairs Minister Shahbaz Bhatti after he campaigned for changes in the law. Last July, two brothers charged with defaming Islam's prophet were shot and killed as they stepped out of a courtroom.

Tariq, a Christian, is currently in hiding after authorities charged him with blasphemy. He said the charges came over a quarrel he had with two customers who bought faulty firecrackers from him. When he refused to apologize, he said the customers went to the police in Lahore and told them a lie that he had stuffed the firecrackers with pages torn from the Quran. Fearing capture by Pakistani authorities while he seeks asylum outside of the country, he spoke on condition that he be identified by his first name only.

The Pakistani representative of RescueChristians, speaking on condition of anonymity for his personal safety, said several Christians are waiting for travel documents to secretly leave Pakistan, while others are in jail awaiting trial and targeted for death by militant groups.

The two young men who entrapped Ahmad at his homeopathic clinic in the eastern Punjab provincial capital of Lahore belong to a banned militant group, Lashkar-e-Taiba, according to local police. Lashkar-e-Taiba and other Muslim extremist groups consider adherents of the Ahmadiyya sect to be heretics.

The Ahmadiyya sect contends that the Mehdi or savior, who is prophesized in Islam, came about 100 years ago. This belief challenges Prophet Muhammad's position as Islam's last prophet, a basic tenet of the faith. Pakistan amended its constitution in 1974 to make it a crime for Ahmadis, as they are called, to identify themselves as Muslims.

But businessmen nearby Ahmad's clinic said he never preached his religion. They said the police, who are required by a government order issued last year to rigorously investigate allegations of blasphemy before filing charges, never spoke with them or took their statements.

His neighbors said they were saddened by his arrest but would not dare testify on his behalf.

Mohammad Ershad, a barber, called Ahmad a "thorough gentleman," but added: "People don't want to say anything. Everyone feels it is better to save oneself."

Habib, who runs a nearby photocopying business, said he has known Ahmad for 30 years. Too afraid to be identified by his full name, he said: "No one wants to be on the target hit list of the mullahs. No one stops them. No one is safe."

Associated Press writer Babar Dogar contributed to this report. Follow Kathy Gannon, AP's special regional correspondent for Pakistan and Afghanistan, on Twitter at www.twitter.com/kathygannon.

Blasphemy case: Briton in Pakistan sentenced to death

A court in the Pakistani city of Rawalpindi has sentenced a 70-year-old British man to death after convicting him of blasphemy.

BBC (24.01.2014) - Muhammad Asghar was arrested in 2010 after writing letters to various people claiming to be a prophet, reports say.

His lawyers argued for leniency, saying he has a history of mental illness, but this was rejected by a medical panel.

Pakistan's controversial blasphemy laws carry a potential death sentence for anyone deemed to have insulted Islam.

Several recent cases have prompted international concern about the application of these laws.

Asghar, who is from Edinburgh, Scotland, was accused of writing letters to police officers claiming to be a prophet. He is thought to have lived in Pakistan for several years.

"Asghar claimed to be a prophet even inside the court. He confessed it in front of the judge," Javed Gul, a government prosecutor, told AFP news agency.

Sensitive issue

But his lawyer told the BBC's Saba Eitizaz that she was forcibly removed from the case by the judge and that proceedings were carried out behind closed doors.

His lawyer says she will launch an appeal against the verdict, which was delivered late on Thursday. Higher courts in Pakistan have been known to overturn blasphemy verdicts handed down in lower courts because of insufficient evidence.

Asgharn has been diagnosed as a paranoid schizophrenic and had treatment at the Royal Victoria Hospital in Edinburgh, but the court did not accept his medical reports from the UK, reports say.

He has been in jail since his arrest in 2010 and his lawyer says he has also tried to take his own life in jail on one occasion.

Correspondents say Asghar is unlikely to be executed as Pakistan has had a de facto moratorium on the death penalty since 2008. He was also ordered to pay a substantial fine by the court.

A Scottish government spokesman said they were "concerned" about the case.

"As a minimum we would urge the Pakistani authorities to abide by the moratorium they have on the death penalty. Our thoughts are with Mr Asghar's family at this difficult time," the spokesman said.

Senior UK Foreign Office Minister Baroness Warsi said British officials were providing consular support to Mr Asghar.

"We will be raising our concerns in the strongest possible terms with the Pakistani government," she added.

The legal charity Reprieve has urged the UK government to take immediate steps to protect Asghar, adding that he has "a long and documented history of psychological ill-health" and needs constant care.

Critics argue that Pakistan's blasphemy laws are frequently misused to settle personal scores and that members of minority groups are also unfairly targeted.

In 2012 the arrest of a young Christian girl, Rimsha Masih, on blasphemy charges provoked international outrage. After being detained in a high security prison for several weeks she was eventually released and her family subsequently fled to Canada.

Blasphemy is a highly sensitive issue in Pakistan, where 97% of the population are Muslim.

Muslims constitute a majority of those prosecuted, followed by the minority Ahmadi community.

Earlier this year, another 72-year-old British Pakistani from the Ahmadi community, Masood Ahmed, was jailed on blasphemy charges.

A pending matter

Four and a half years after she was first charged with blasphemy, what exactly is happening with Asia Bibi and her case

TNS (05.01.2014) - People seem to have forgotten Asia Bibi while she languishes in one jail or the other for the last four and a half years. Her appeal for review of her death conviction remains pending before the Lahore High Court. In June 2009, Asia Bibi was asked by her co-workers to fetch water while working on a farm in Lahore's outskirts.

Some of the Muslim women are said to have refused to drink it because they considered the utensil "unclean" after being touched by a Christian woman. An argument ensued where Bibi allegedly uttered derogatory remarks about Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). A few days later Bibi was charged of blasphemy and arrested from arrested in Ittanwalai village.

Bibi, a blasphemy accused under Section 295-C of Pakistan Penal Code, was sentenced to death by a local court in December 2009.

Under the blasphemy laws, a high court must confirm a death sentence from a lower court. Due to this legal procedure, many of those who are convicted remain on death row for years.

Talking on telephone with *TNS*, from an undisclosed location, Aasia's husband Ashiq Masih said, "She is scared. There is no hope for her release".

He recalled how a mob dragged his wife to a local police station, where she was jailed and charged with blasphemy. "She has not done anything," he maintained.

Bibi's husband and five children are living in hiding. Fearing violence from extremists, they prefer to hide their identity and often relocate their home. Last June, when they went to see her in jail in Sheikhpura, they were told that Bibi had been shifted to the Central Jail in Multan. This came as a surprise both for the victim's counsel and the family.

The case of Aasia Bibi gained prominence when Salmaan Taseer, then the Punjab governor, went to jail to meet her and to assure her of all possible legal help. Taseer had maintained that the case against Bibi was fabricated and based on wrong grounds. He had moved a request to the former president of Pakistan to pardon Bibi's sentence.

Taseer's open support for Aasia Bibi cost him his life. His police guard, Mumtaz Qadri, who thought Taseer was a supporter of a blasphemer, killed him on Jan 4, 2011 in Islamabad.

An Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) awarded Qadri a death penalty in October 2011, nine months after he had committed the murder. His appeal against the conviction is also pending before the court.

About two months after the assassination of Taseer, the then federal minister for minorities Shahbaz Bhatti was also killed in the country's capital for talking about the need to revise the controversial blasphemy laws.

Aasia Bibi's case had prompted widespread international attention. Pope Benedict XVI had also issued a condemnation statement.

"Taseer was the last hope for Aasia Bibi," says Nadeem Anthony, council-member of Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP). "The complainant of the case, a cleric of the local mosque in Bibi's village, is not a witness in the case. He believed what the local women told him. She was sent to jail and the case was lodged a few days after the alleged incident occurred."

The HRCP has documented scores of cases in which the blasphemy laws have been misused — to settle personal scores or to victimise the marginalised sections of society and religious minorities. The mere fact of being a Christian or an Ahmadi in Pakistan makes an individual vulnerable to the misuse of blasphemy laws.

"There are enough legal grounds which can help Bibi's release conditionally, if the appellate court hears her case at the earliest on humanitarian grounds. We have moved an application for this purpose," said S.K. Chaudhry, victim's counsel.

The hearing is expected in the coming weeks and Chaudhry hopes to get justice.

"In my view, Bibi is in jail quite unnecessarily," said Hina Jilani, a human rights activist, asking: "But even if her appeal is heard and she is set free by the court, who is going to protect her in the society?"

These past couple of years, Taseer's death anniversary has been marked by thin candle light vigils in his memory, as opposed to thousands of religious extremists congregating across Pakistan in support of his murderer Qadri, upholding him as a hero.

Jilani thinks it is quite unfortunate — "Our politicians are not taking such issues seriously. First, many people, if their sentence is overturned, remain on the mercy of the society where they are unsafe and continued to be victimised by extremist elements. There are serious concerns about the safety of such people."

Islamic scholars in Pakistan push for hate speech ban

HRWF comment: HRWF commends this effort by Pakistani scholars to address hate speech in their country. Violence and social hostility against religious minorities continues to be a serious concern for the future of democracy and human rights in Pakistan (see the latest HRWF World Report at <http://www.hrwf.org>). Government authorities, faith leaders and civil society have a clear responsibility to work together to create a secure environment for all citizens to be able to practise their faith openly and safely.

The Christian Science Monitor (06.01.2014) - Pakistan's top body of Islamic scholars is pushing for a crackdown on hate speech in an effort to curb intra-faith violence in the world's second-largest Muslim country.

Last month, 32 groups representing the major Islamic sects in Pakistan signed on to a code of conduct that prohibits hate speech against other sects, restricts the use of mosque loudspeakers, and bans incendiary literature and graffiti.

The religious leaders are trying to combat a steady rise in sectarian disputes. In 2012, at least 537 Pakistanis were killed in attacks related to religious sect, a 71 percent increase from the previous year, according to the Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies. Yet while the effort has been praised for its goals, there is widespread skepticism that it can be enforced.

The voluntary code of conduct, announced on Dec. 2, came on the heels of lethal riots in Rawalpindi, a garrison town outside Islamabad. Eleven people died after a procession organized by Shia worshipers ended in clashes with students at a Sunni seminary.

Intra-faith violence has continued since the adoption of the code. On Jan. 1, a suicide bomber killed two Shia pilgrims returning from Iran, and on Jan. 3, gunmen killed two senior Sunni leaders in Islamabad. Last month, two suicide bombings at Shia mosques in Rawalpindi and Karachi killed four, and tit-for-tat assassinations left two Shia scholars and a Sunni leader dead. While Sunnis are in the majority in Pakistan, its Shia minority ranks second behind that of Iran.

Tahir Mehmood Ashrafi, who heads the Pakistan Ulema Council that is pushing for enforcement of the code of conduct, says his own example proves that Islamic extremists can change.

Mr. Ashrafi is a former member of Sipa-e-Sahaba, a Sunni group banned in 2002 for its ties to militants. He credits his departure from the group to time he spent with the

Tablighi Jamaat, an ascetic movement whose adherents travel to remote communities in order to spark an Islamic revival.

"If we don't put an end to such fighting, Pakistan will suffer, and the rest of the world won't be spared either," says Ashrafi.

Adherents to the code agree not to declare others as non-Muslims – usually the first step towards attacking them – and to steer clear of controversial topics. The mosques of Ahmadis, a minority Muslim sect that is routinely targeted by extremists and had no representation among the signatories, would be protected, along with churches and temples. However, the main thrust of the initiative is to dial down hostilities between Muslim sects.

Signatories to the code also pledged to hold conferences across Pakistan to promote religious tolerance, and to meet with members of parliament to urge them to put the code into law and to enforce it.

Yet the group faces other challenges. Ashrafi himself is no stranger to controversy. He is criticized for continuing to associate with Sunni leaders like Malik Ishaq, who spent the last decade in and out of prison for allegedly overseeing attacks on Shias.

"Ashrafi does not necessarily represent the mainstream perception," says Ayesha Siddiqa, a security expert based in Islamabad. She warns that even if the heads of Muslim groups agree to stop inciting violence against each other, their rank and file is another issue.

A series of assassinations in the 1990s gave rise to armed Shia and Sunni groups that have had trouble controlling their members over the past two decades. Sunni militants formed Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, and Shias Sipah-i-Muhammad. The Pakistan government banned these groups in 2001, but both still operate. Lashkar-e-Jhangvi claimed responsibility for attacks on Shias in Quetta that killed hundreds last year.

This is not the first time a religious code has been adopted in Pakistan. In 1997, in a bid to stem the violence, senior clerics signed on to an agreement similar to the one being promoted by Ashrafi today, but no legislation was ever passed to make it a binding commitment.

"The books that were banned in the 1990's are still around" says Ahmed Ludhianvi, head of Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat, the group that formed after Sipa-e-Sahaba was banned. "Just the name of the publisher, and maybe the title, has changed."

Limits on mosque loudspeakers

In fact, Pakistan hasn't enforced much of its existing laws prohibiting speech that incites violence. Punjab, Pakistan's most populous province, has a 1965 law on its books that prohibit the use of a mosque's loudspeakers for anything except the call to prayer and an Arabic portion of the Friday sermon. If that law had been enforced in Rawalpindi last month, said an intelligence agency inquiry into the clashes, the violence could have been prevented.

"Implementation is 95 percent of the resolution of the issue, and that is not there," says Ms. Siddiqa. "You can't just have a few mullahs get together and say they agree...the government has to be on board as well."

Muhammad Amin Shaheedi, the head of Majlis Wahdatul Muslimeen, one of Pakistan's largest Shia political parties, says he welcomes the effort to form an agreement among the country's scholars, but would like to see the government prosecute those responsible for violence. "Even if we sign 50 agreements, it just takes one suicide bomber, one man to come and blow up a mosque or attack a procession, and this agreement can't harm him at all."

ⁱ In 1947, 20% of the population were Hindus. Nowadays only 1.7%.

ⁱⁱ Ten out of 342 seats in the parliament are allocated to minority representatives. The *Jamiat Ulama-e-Islam* (JUI) condemns extremism and terrorism. In the last ten years it has been raising its voice for equal rights for minorities, though unsuccessfully.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ahmadiyya is an Islamic reformist movement, founded toward the end of the 19th century. Pakistan is the home of the largest Ahmadi population in the world.

^{iv} See comment of Article 298-A,B,C at Refworld: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/3df4be8e8.html> (Pakistan: Whether section 298 of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) refers to any offence under religious law or Shari'a and, if so, the penalty under religious law or Shari'a). Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada.

"Referring to the text of section 298 of the PPC, a professor of law at Harvard University who specializes in Islamic law stated that, to his understanding, there are other penal provisions in Pakistan which are meant to be declarative of Shari'a which carry a much more severe punishment (15 Jan. 2002). According to the professor these provisions purport to enact the old Shari'a form of the crime of blasphemy – insult to the Prophet, the Qur'an, and other holy personages – and allow for the death penalty (ibid.).

The professor went on to state that "this reflects one form at least of the Shari'a crime of *sabb al-nabi* or insult to the Prophet" and, while in the "usual circumstances rarely enforced," often carries a death penalty with no possibility of repentance for anyone who was proved to have either spoken words or carried out acts insulting to God, the Prophet, his family, or the angels (ibid.).

(...) According to the professor, the offences as described in section 298 "are not Shari'a penalties per se, taken in any literal way from old books" (ibid.). The professor concluded that "Pakistani judges do not apply the Shari'a directly except insofar as they may refer to it in guiding their interpretation of the laws and insofar as certain higher courts have the power to test the conformity of statutes with Shari'a principles and to declare them unconstitutional in the event they fail that test" (ibid.).

For a description of the use of section 298 and section 295 of the PPC, which compose Pakistan's laws on blasphemy, please refer to Amnesty International's May 2001 publication entitled "Pakistan: Insufficient Protection of Religious Minorities" available at

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/ASA33/008/2001/en/4bce2d66-d95a-11dd-a057-592cb671dd8b/asa330082001en.html>

^v Blasphemy Law in Pakistan: Historical Perspectives and Disastrous Effects/ Background Resources in Misuse of the Blasphemy Law and Religious Minorities in Pakistan (Commission of the Churches on International Affairs, World Council of Churches (2013)

^{vi} Between 1998 and 2005, 647 persons were charged on the grounds of blasphemy.

^{vii} More than half of them live in seven districts of Central Punjab : Lahore, Faisalabad, Kasur, Sheikhpura, Sialkot, Gujranwala and Toba Tek Singh.