

Notice: Undefined index: et_header_layout in /home/hrwfe90/domains/hrwf.eu/public_html/wp-content/plugins/pdf-print/pdf-print.php on line 1214

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PAKISTAN: Ashfaq Masih: another Christian sentenced to death for blasphemy

Ashfaq Masih: another Christian sentenced to death for blasphemy in Pakistan

Claiming during a commercial dispute that he “follows only Jesus” and does not give discounts to members of Sufi ascetic orders was enough for getting a capital sentence.

By Daniela Bovolenta

Bitter Winter (11.07.2022) – <https://bit.ly/3IVqfTz> – On July 4, 2022, a Lahore, Pakistan, Session Court sentence to death for blasphemy a Christian called Ashfaq Masih. The decision follows a similar one of June 11, when the High Court confirmed the death penalty in a case concerning two Christian brothers, Amoon and Qaiser Ayub.

Masih' s family has released a statement where the man explains what happened in June 2017, when he was arrested. He has been in jail ever since, except when in November 2019 he was accompanied by the police, handcuffed, to his mother's funeral.

"I am innocent, Masih said, the case against me is baseless, false, and frivolous and framed against me just to destroy my business. My business was running well, and I was very happy but Muhammad Naveed, who is also a motorcycle mechanic and had started a shop in front of me, was jealous because my business was doing well and had a good reputation in the area. We had already fought a few days before the incident. And he had threatened me with dire consequences. On the day of the incident, I had an argument with Muhammad Irfan, who was refusing to pay me after getting his bicycle repaired. When I asked Irfan to pay the bill we agreed, he responded by saying 'I am a follower of Peer Fakhir (Sufi Muslim ascetics) and don't ask for the bill.' I insisted for my bill and said that I don't follow anyone other than Jesus, and so wasn't interested in the man's religious status."

"Irfan went to Naveed's shop and after a few minutes he came back and turned the whole matter into religious affairs and started accusing me of committing blasphemy. People started gathering around my shop, and the owner [of the premises where I work], Muhammad Ashfaq, who had already asked me to vacate his shop, also arrived. This was an opportunity for Naveed and Ashfaq to settle the score, so they complained to the police

and the police registered a first information report (FIR) under blasphemy law section 295 C which has a mandatory death penalty.”

The statement “I follow only Jesus” was constructed as “I refuse to follow Prophet Muhammad” and qualified as blasphemy. The Session Court agreed.

The family also said that the judgement was delivered very quickly, and without really listening to the defense. This is the rule in lower courts in Pakistan, where accusations of blasphemy are automatically believed. Masih now places his hopes in the appeal.

Photo: Ashfaq Masih. From Twitter.

Further reading about FORB in Pakistan on HRWF website

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