

PAKISTAN: Asia Bibi is free at last

British Pakistani Christian Association (08.05.2019) – Pakistan's most famous blasphemy law victim Asia Bibi was finally released from her homeland where she has become the most hated figure in the country despite law courts exonerating her from the false charges that had kept her incarcerated in solitary confinement for almost 10 years.

In the early hours of the morning today(1am) BPCA received confirmation from a British diplomat that Asia Bibi had safely exited Pakistan. Asia Bibi bravely held on to her faith through the most brutal of incarcerations that involved her having access to sunlight for two hours per month. Now she finally travels to Canada to be reunited with her children.

Asia a berry-picker was beaten and raped for an alleged blasphemy offence in June 2009 when she reacted to the abusive treatment she was receiving for drinking from the same well as Muslims. While she was being beaten and berated by women colleagues she simply uttered the words 'my Christ died for me what did Muhammed do for you?' The men workers from her berry field then began their attack and returned with a mob a few days later to lynch her.

Other local Christians called the police to get her put into safe custody but then a local Imam (Islamic preacher) then accused her of blasphemy and stated that he had personally witnessed the blasphemy despite being at neither event where the alleged crimes took place.

Asia Bibi was failed her High Court Appeal in November 2016, however on 31st October 2018 a Supreme Court Appeal exonerated her original charges and although the decision was made through Pakistan's Apex Court, she was forced to remain in the

country to address a petition to her Supreme Court decision submitted by extremist group Tehreek-e-lebaaik. This was after the country's prime minister Imran Khan capitulated to the demands of extremists whose riots had brought the country to a standstill.

On 29th January, three months after her acquittal by the Supreme Court, the court finally quashed the petition by Tehreek-e-Labaaik in essence finally declaring Asia Bibi free and freeing her from her original charges completely.

On 11 April 2019, Prime Minister Imran Khan stated that a "complication" has delayed the departure of Asia Bibi from the country.

British Pakistani Christian Association Chairman, Wilson Chowdhry has been communicating with the husband of Asia Bibi daily up until Monday 6th May 2019, he said:

"Ashiq has always remained hopeful of an imminent release from Pakistan and we have both been shocked at how long it has taken.

"Asia Bibi and Ashiq have remained resolute in their faith and have prayed daily for their release and today God has answered their prayers.

"BPCA are grateful that we have been able to be a part of this family's journey to freedom and will continue to pray for them and assist them where we can."

He added:

"Having spoken to various diplomats and Government officials I have been astounded by reports that the delay was caused by the myopic approach by leaders of Pakistan's military who have prevented the exit of Asia Bibi through fear of the bad press the nation of Pakistan would receive.

"Their pernicious delays have only served to fuel more

international shame on a country which has already hit rock-bottom with their poor human rights record.

“Asia Bibi is unwell and has suffered 10 years of isolation both in and out of captivity – she must be treated with utmost care and receive appropriate medical care now she is free.

“The Pakistani Government must ensure Asia and her family are compensated for the loss to their freedom and the fragile safety they have had to suffer under their auspices.

“Moreover moves must be made to reform or abrogate the infamous blasphemy laws of Pakistan.”

Several campaigns prior to Asia Bibi’s conviction and since have failed to alter or remove the draconian blasphemy laws of Pakistan. These laws were introduced to India by Britian in 1860 to protect Muslims from Hindus, but the Pakistan Penal Code was islamised in the 1980’s by dictator Zia Ul Haq and have since been used as a tool for discrimination by Islamists and to exhort property and settle vendettas with Christians and Ahmadis by Muslims.

British Pakistani Christian Association has continued to track and support 14 Christian blasphemy accused, besides Asia Bibi throughout the years.

Report on Blasphemy victims still in Jail		
Shugafta & Shafqat	Accusation of Sending Blasphemous msg	Jul-2013
Shezad Masih	Using Blasphemous words	Jul-2017
Qaiser Ayub	Using Blasphemous words	Nov-2014
Sawan Masih	Blasphemous Comments	Nov-2013
Imran Masih	Blasphemous Video in phone	May-2016
Nabeel Masih	Posting a derogatory image on social media	Oct-2016

Perzvaiz Masih	Using Blasphemous words	Sep-2015
Patras Masih	Posting a derogatory image on social media	Feb-2018
Awais Qamar	Using PVC banner as carpet which had religious words	Jul-2015
Humayun Faisal	Burnt shreds of the Quran in a pile of Garbage	May-2015
Ishfaq Masih	Using Blasphemous words	Jun-2017
Asif Stephen	Burning of Quran	Aug-2017
Nadeem Masih	Blasphemous poem through text msg	Oct-2015
Yaqoob Bashir	Burning Booklet containing Quranic verses	Jun-2015

British Pakistani Christian Association, continues to provide advocacy and humanitarian aid to Christians in Pakistan and the Pak-Christian diaspora.

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HRWF database of news and information on over 70 countries: <http://hrwf.eu/newsletters/forb/>

List of hundreds of documented cases of believers of various faiths in 20 countries: <http://hrwf.eu/forb/forb-and-blasphemy-prisoners-list/>