

Shame on Pakistan: Sharia overrules the law

ACN International (04.02.2020) – <http://bit.ly/310r0bt> – “Once again justice has been defeated and once again our State has shown itself unable to treat Christians as Pakistani citizens,” said a distraught Nagheena Younus, speaking to Aid to the Church in Need-Italy (ACN-Italy) after this morning’s hearing (11 am local time) involving her daughter Huma before the Sindh High Court in Karachi.

The two presiding High Court Justices, Muhammad Iqbal Kalhoro and Irshad Ali Shah, ruled that even if Huma were a minor, the marriage between the Christian girl and her kidnapper Abdul Jabbar would still be valid because, under Islamic law (Sharia), once a girl of any age has had her first period, she can marry. Therefore, the Sindh Child Marriage Restraint Act, which was adopted in 2014 but never enforced, is of no consequence. “We hoped that the law could have been applied for the first time in this case,” said lawyer Tabassum Yousaf, “but evidently in Pakistan these laws are formulated and approved only to improve the image of the country in front of the international community, ask for development funds and freely trade Pakistani products on the European market.”

The parents of the 14-year-old Catholic girl kidnapped on 10 October and, more broadly, the Christian community had high expectations about today’s hearing. Huma was due to appear in court in accordance with the request made to the investigating officer Akhtar Hussain by the High Court justices in the previous hearing on 16 January. When asked about the girl’s absence, the latter simply said that the young woman had been

summoned per regulation. Since the start of this case, Hussain has maintained an ambiguous attitude, raising strong suspicions of collusion with the kidnapper Jabbar.

Despite this, the justices instructed the policeman to have Huma examined so as to determine her age, which her lawyer Yousaf asked for again this morning. "It is clear that since Hussain has been put in charge there is a high probability that the test results will be falsified," said the lawyer. "But we keep hoping that the girl being underage will be proven so that she could at least be placed in women's shelter, and removed from her rapist."

The next hearing is scheduled for 4 March, but unfortunately, even if it is proven that Huma is a minor, the justices' decision to deem the marriage valid, eliminates any possibility that Jabbar will be punished for the offences of abduction and forced marriage.

Aid to the Church in Need-Italy continues to support Huma's family and lawyer.