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Foreign NGO women under threat of forced marriage

Senior clerics in Kohistan stated that if a single foreign woman is caught accompanying a marriageable Pakistani man, she should marry him.

by Massimo Introvigne

[Bitter Winter](#) (07.11.2023) - Several NGOs operate in Pakistan to bring charitable aid to afflicted areas. Although there may always be exceptions and incidents, both men and women in international NGOs are normally instructed about the cultural sensitivities prevailing in Pakistan and try to respect them.

However, what happened last week in Kohistan, a part of the Pakistani province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, took the NGOs by surprise. A group of twelve local clerics issued a fatwa against NGO women seen in the streets walking or “mingling” with Pakistani men.

The statement says that if the foreign woman is single and the Pakistani man is in a position to marry her, they should marry. With respect to the man, this means that he should be either single or have three wives or less, and they consent to a new marriage, as Pakistani law allows Muslim men to practice polygamy according to the shari’a.

While single NGO women seen with marriageable local men should marry them, those who are not single or who have “accompanied” a man who is not in a position to marry them should be expelled from the country.

The local civil authorities told the media that the fatwa has no legal value. But radical Muslims circulate it through social media and in a restless area there are always extra-legal ways to enforce such pronouncements.

A senior cleric [told the media](#) that, “NGO women who disregard our directives should consider leaving Kohistan voluntarily, otherwise, we may take measures to either remove them or facilitate their marriages to the colleagues they are seen with.”

Obviously, such incidents would also discourage foreign women to work in Pakistan as volunteers, to the detriment of those who need their help.

USCIRF “particularly concerned” about mistreatment of Hazaras and Ahmadis

A November 6 statement castigates the repatriation of Afghan members of religious minorities and the continued persecution of the Ahmadis.

by Marco Respinti

A [statement severely criticizing Pakistan](#) has been published on November 6 by the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF). The USCIRF is an independent, bipartisan U.S. federal government commission created by the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA). Its commissioners are appointed by the President and by Congressional leaders of both political parties.

Pakistan is criticized by USCIRF both for the repatriation of religious minority refugees from Afghanistan to a country where they will be persecuted and for its continued persecution of Ahmadi Muslims.

“Over the last several weeks, the statement notes, Pakistani officials have called for the repatriation of ‘illegal migrants,’ including 1.7 million Afghan refugees who lack documentation. Authorities have reportedly conducted raids and established deportation centers to hold individuals who do not voluntarily return to their country of origin. We are particularly concerned that the Pakistani government may forcibly return to Afghanistan religious minorities who fled persecution.”

USCIRF notes that, “Under Taliban rule, Christians, Shi’a Muslims, Ahmadiyya Muslims, and Sikhs cannot freely practice their religious beliefs in Afghanistan.” Many of the refugees Afghanistan threatens to deport belong to the Hazara Shi’a minority, which is also discriminated in Pakistan and against which the Afghan regime is perpetrating [a genocide](#).

In Pakistan, Ahmadi Muslims are accused of being infidels and heretics and of rejecting the Islamic doctrine that Muhammad was “the Seal of the Prophets,” meaning that no genuine prophet could appear after him. Ahmadis regard their founder Mirza Ghulam Ahmad as “both a prophet and a follower of the Holy Prophet [Muhammad],” which is not good enough for conservative Muslims, who would not tolerate the use of the word “prophet” applied to any post-Muhammad spiritual master.

“Throughout 2023,” the USCIRF says, “incidents targeting the Ahmadiyya community have increased. Despite an August ruling by the Lahore High Court mandating that Ahmadiyya mosques built before 1984 cannot be destroyed or altered, government and nonstate actors continue to vandalize structures, prevent the construction of minarets, and erase the public display of Qur’anic verses. Members of the community continue to be detained on blasphemy charges and are denied equal voting rights in local, provincial, and national elections unless they renounce their faith.”

International institutions continue to condemn Pakistan for its egregious violations of the rights of religious minorities. These violations are increasing. It is time for words to be followed by sanctions.

Christian couple granted bail in blasphemy case: 'Landmark decision'

By [Anugrah Kumar](#)

[Christian Post](#) (23.10.2023) - A Pakistani court has granted bail to a Christian couple accused of blasphemy, citing insufficient evidence. A rights group has called it a "landmark judgment," which has sparked calls for changes to the nation's controversial blasphemy laws.

Kiran Bibi and Shaukat were granted bail on Oct. 18 by Additional Sessions Court Judge Mian Shahid Javed, UCA News [reported](#), adding that the couple had been accused of defiling the Quran.

Javed cited a lack of evidence of "willful damage or defilement of the original text of the Holy Quran" under Section 295-B of the Pakistan Penal Code.

Nasir Saeed, director of the U.K.-based Centre for Legal Aid, Assistance and Settlement, or CLAAS, lauded the decision in a statement shared with The Christian Post.

"This landmark judgment breaks from the norm," Saeed added.

In Pakistan, violating Section 295-B could lead to life imprisonment. The couple was accused by Muhammad Tamoor, who claimed to have seen Quranic pages fly out of the couple's house on Sept. 8.

Tamoor claimed he had been given access to the house by Kiran Bibi. She suggested the pages might have been accidentally thrown by her children — all minors. The court noted gaps in the evidence and report.

CLAAS also mentioned the court found no credible eyewitness testimony that backed the severe allegations. Questions were raised about the actual perpetrator.

The couple's bail was set at 100,000 Pakistani rupees (\$357). The court ordered police to conduct further inquiries into the allegations.

Saeed welcomed the call for further investigation. "This decision underscores the importance of a thorough investigation to establish the facts and ensure justice prevails," he was quoted as saying.

He also emphasized the need for changes in Pakistan's blasphemy laws. These laws have led to sentences of death or life imprisonment, although no executions have occurred.

In August, attacks against Christians occurred in Jaranwala town, where churches and [homes were torched](#) following blasphemy accusations against two local Christians. Christians make up roughly 1.6% of Pakistan's 241 million population.

In a separate case last August, a two-member Supreme Court bench granted bail to another Christian who was also accused of blasphemy against Islam.

Justices Qazi Faeel Isa and Syed Mansoor Ali Shah ordered the release of Salamat Mansha Masih, expressing concern about the frequency of blasphemy accusations. The state must protect suspects until cases are resolved, the justices said.

In another instance, a sessions court granted bail to two [Christian nurses](#) in September 2021. It was the first time bail was granted in a blasphemy case at this level, attorneys noted at the time.

Accusations often lead to mob violence, with little consequence for false accusers.

Lower courts often bow to Islamist pressure, leading to numerous convictions. In January, a Muslim woman was sentenced to death for allegedly committing blasphemy via text messages, marking another rare instance of such a ruling against a Muslim.

In December 2021, a mob killed a Sri Lankan man over blasphemy allegations. Although arrests were made, no legislative changes have occurred to curb false accusations.

America's reaction to the impending threat to Pakistani minorities

Senge Sering

[Baltimore Post-Examiner](#) (13.09.2023) - There is a growing concern among US officials about the egregious religious freedom violations in Pakistan. In the recent past, lesser-Muslims (Ahmadis, Shias, and Zikris) and non-Muslims from places like Faisalabad, Sargodha, Lahore, Turbat, Karachi, Gilgit, and Dera Ismail Khan, were attacked, charged with false blasphemy, and incarcerated while churches, Ahmadi mosques, temples and Shia centers were vandalized and violently razed.

On September 5, a US State Department spokesperson expressed grave concern about recent attacks on Christian homes and churches in response to alleged Quran desecration in the Pakistani town of Jaranwala. The spokesperson reiterated that the US government supports peaceful freedom of expression as well as everyone's right to freedom of religion and belief. He went on to say that the US government does not tolerate religiously motivated violence because violence or the threat of violence is never an acceptable form of expression. He asked Pakistani authorities to investigate the attacks on Christians.

While the Pakistani state has systematically persecuted linguistic and religious minorities for decades through constitutional provisions, this persecution has increased in recent months due to excessive military interference in state affairs. It is widely assumed that the organizations responsible for attacking Christians, Hindus, and lesser-Muslims are military allies who enjoy impunity for their actions. In places like Tharparker, Amarkot, Chitral, Parachinar, Quetta and Gilgit, the use of religiously motivated laws encourages involuntary conversion thereby altering the ethnic demographics of Shias and non-Muslims. Just a few days back, a large Sunni crowd in Gilgit-Baltistan had blocked the

main road connecting to the rest of Pakistan, demanding that a local Shia mullah be charged with blasphemy. Road blockages like these frequently occur, and are liberally used by extremists as a blackmail tool to force their will and it results in a shortage of food and medicine for nearly two million locals.

Given that the Pakistani government and military openly demonstrate a lack of will and capacity to ensure the security of its citizens; tens of thousands of local Shias took to the streets in the town of Skardo, demanding the merger of their territory with India. Authorities declared an emergency afterward banning political gatherings in open spaces. With Shia-Sunni clashes looming, locals accuse the army of inciting sectarianism in order to aid Jihadi recruitment against India. Hundreds of local secular activists have been charged with terrorism and sedition in Pakistan over the last six decades for speaking out against forced religious and ethnic demographic changes, the activities of Islamic militants, and the brazen encroachment of Pakistani and Chinese companies on local lands and resources. Locals now expect the United Nations to impose sanctions on Pakistan in order to deter the country's increasing attacks on minorities.

A large number of Pakistani Muslims regard Shias and Ahmadis as members of deviant sects of Islam, which encourages Hanafi mainstream Muslims to attack and torture them. Pakistan's contempt for fundamental human rights is evident in its constitutional persecution of minorities. The renewed effort by the Pakistani parliament to enact laws to increase and broaden the scope of blasphemy punishment exposes the country's deteriorating religious freedom conditions. The unchecked use of loudspeakers in public places by religious forces is a major medium of provocation for anti-Muslim mob attacks and riots. Many recent reports have highlighted sexual and gender-based violence against minor non-Muslim girls in Sindh and Punjab provinces, as well as their kidnapping and forced conversion.

Shia oppression has remained a feature of Pakistan's religious politics, with neither the civilian or military governments willing to put an end to it. Shias are considered non-Muslims by the organizations and religious leaders on which the army relies for Jihad recruitment.

Extremists use references from the Holy Scriptures to justify Shia killings, forced conversions, denial of basic rights, and eviction from ancestral lands. Shias have become a minority in areas where they were once the majority, such as Parachinar, Chitral, and Gilgit. Shia forced conversions and killings in Pakistani cities such as Dera Ismail Khan, Jhang, Quetta, and Karachi have gone on unabated for decades, while authorities have done nothing.

In recent months, anti-Shia forces have launched rockets into Shia neighborhoods in Parachinar, injuring a large number of people. The intention was to drive Shias from their ancestral lands. During the attacks, a video emerged showing a Jihadi leader addressing a large crowd and threatening the annihilation of Shias in Parachinar.

Invoking Islamic scriptures, he called for Jihad-e-Akbar against Shias, which translates as "the Greatest of All Jihads." He claimed that killing Shias and ridding Pakistan of them was Jihad-e-Akbar, which would be the greatest service to Islam. In his speech, he referred to Shias as the filthiest of all infidels (kafirs). He reiterated that killing Shias was Farz-e-Ain, which means the most fundamental or core of all Islamic obligations. He claimed that any Muslim who dies while attacking Shias becomes Shaheed-e-Akbar, or the most superior of Islamic martyrs, and that killing Shias opens the gates of Jannah (paradise) for Muslims. He urged his friends to continue fighting because, in his words, the Shia neighborhoods would soon be surrounded by Muslim fighters who would block the roads, leaving Shias with no way out, and Parachinar would soon be devoid of Shias.

As we remember the victims of 9-11, Pakistan and Afghanistan are once again becoming safe havens for Al-Qaida and its affiliates, endangering the safety and well-being of local religious and ethnic minorities. TTP launched an attack on Chitral a few days ago, killing and injuring several Pakistani soldiers. Chitral is home to Ismailia-Shias and Kalasha non-Muslim Animists, who account for more than 30% of the local population. It is feared that the Taliban intend to control the religious demographics of this district, which was once dominated by Ismailis. Local estimates put the Kalasha population at 2,000 or less, and their women are being targeted as a result of molestation, kidnappings, forced conversion, and marriages to Muslim men.

The international community should take concrete steps to protect Chitral's religious minorities so that we do not end up in a situation similar to that of Iraq's Yazidis. The Taliban have a massive fighting force and logistical support, and wiping out 2,000 people would not be difficult or time-consuming if the international community refused to intervene. Pakistan is a failed state, and the international community should intervene to ensure the survival of minorities.

Furthermore, TTP's intrusion threatens neighboring Gilgit, where China has undertaken a number of megaprojects such as mineral extraction and dam construction. Such incidents, it is feared, will encourage China to station troops in Pakistan. Previously, China planned to station security forces in Pakistan but was unable to do so due to disagreements with the PAK government. The arrival of Chinese troops would be a huge setback for locals, who are already struggling to keep their lands and cultures safe from the Chinese developers. As we speak, we are rapidly becoming another Xinjiang or Tibet.

TTP-affiliated groups continue to target women's rights activists in Pakistan. Many people have been killed by extremists in areas such as KPK province. Women in Pashtun tribal areas are suffering as the country descends into extremism and is taken over by Taliban-linked groups. Non-Muslim women are more vulnerable than others in this situation. They do not have access to education, religious freedom, places of worship, or health care. Minor non-Muslim girls are kidnapped, raped, and forcibly converted to Islam before being handed to elderly Muslim men as wives. The international community has failed Pakistan's non-Muslim women.

Concerning the TTP attacks, the State Department spokesperson stated that the US shares Pakistan's interest in combating threats to regional stability and is prepared to work with Pakistan to combat militant and terrorist groups. He stated that the US supports the Pakistani government's efforts to combat terrorism and ensure the safety and security of its citizens in a manner that promotes the rule of law.

During the Obama and Trump administrations, Knox Thames served as a special envoy for religious minorities at the US State Department. On August 26, the Hill published his article "In Pakistan, Religious Freedom is Withering," in which he claimed that Pakistan has the harshest blasphemy laws in the world, which has resulted in the incarceration and torture of dozens and dozens of people, many of whom were innocent. He claims that, while blasphemy poses health and safety risks to all Pakistanis, the threats to non-Muslims are particularly severe, as evidenced by the brazen ransacking of churches and Christian homes by mobs in the town of Jaranwala over false blasphemy allegations.

He claims that minorities have no hope of receiving state assistance because the authorities, as well as the country's constitution, aid and abet the attackers. Such attacks become more common during election season, as politicians try to curry favor with extremists in order to secure a share of the conservative Muslim vote. The USCIRF 2022 report states that radical Islamists, which include armed groups, political factions, and individuals, target religious minorities with rhetoric, disinformation, or direct violence. Groups like Sipah-e-Sihaba, Jamat Islami, TLP, and JUIF enjoy widespread popularity and a sizable vote share.

Furthermore, supporting non-Muslims is not profitable for politicians because the current electoral system effectively disenfranchises all non-Muslims and the constitution only allows Muslims to nominate minority candidates.

Islamists have infiltrated so deeply into Pakistan's political structure that Pakistani Prime Minister Sharif succumbed to pressure from the Islamist groups and signed a 12-point agreement with TLP to establish a counter-blasphemy wing within the Federal Investigation Agency and a social media filter against blasphemous content.

Following that, the Senate passed legislation mandating life in prison for insulting Prophet Muhammad's companions, wives, and family members. The blasphemy law has since been amended to prosecute those insulting even Muslims born after Prophet Muhammad's death just because they had the opportunity to interact with his companions or family members. Despite efforts, the international community has been unable to persuade Pakistan to end judicial apartheid against minorities. Following that, on August 16, a mob attacked the Christians of Jaranwala, burning homes, shops, and 21 churches, as well as hundreds of sacred scriptures housed in those churches.

According to Knox, the Ahmadis faced fifteen attacks on their mosques and cemeteries this year, similar to attacks on churches. The ongoing destruction of Ahmadi Muslim places of worship and graveyards is not an isolated incident, but rather a symptom of state-sanctioned repression and constitutional apartheid.

Pakistan's government must ensure freedom of expression and movement as well as the safety of assets and livelihoods of minorities. This can be achieved by holding officials accountable for heinous chronic crimes and prosecuting them for violating the fundamental freedoms enshrined in the UN Declaration. Peace cannot return to Pakistan unless the rulers support a secular social fabric and a constitution based on mutual respect and equality for all citizens.

The US Congress must continue its bipartisan support for the protection of Pakistani non-Muslims and lesser-Muslims and become a strong voice for every minority suffering at the hands of Pakistani regimes and their religious proxies. Furthermore, the US Congress should ask President Biden to ensure that the Pakistani secular forces view the US government as an ally in fighting against systemic restrictions on cultural and religious freedoms.

The Biden administration should keep Pakistan on the list of CPCs for committing and tolerating grave violations of religious freedom and imposing systemic restrictions on non-Muslim and minority Muslim communities. International pressure should be applied through non-profit rights organizations to identify and prosecute officials responsible for violations against minorities.

Although Pakistan is on the list of CPCs, the State Department issued a national interest waiver, exempting Pakistan from the sanctions and other significant penalties that would otherwise accompany that designation. It is past time for the Biden administration to reconsider its waiver policy for Pakistan, or minorities will never have a chance at justice.

The US government should also request that the Pakistani parliament repeal all blasphemy laws immediately. According to the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), blasphemy cases, as well as the type of mob violence that accompanies such accusations, remained a significant threat to religious freedom. The US Congressional Pakistan Caucus should hold a hearing soon to discuss Pakistan's pressing issues of state-sponsored cultural genocide and religious-based apartheid.

Many analysts agree that Pakistan's removal from the FATF grey list has emboldened the country's extremist Muslim groups to intensify attacks on lesser-Muslims and non-Muslim

minorities. In this regard, the international community should reconsider and reinstate Pakistan on the grey list.

The US government is being urged to discourage the IMF and World Bank from providing financial assistance to Pakistan because this money is being used by the Pakistani military to crush minorities, and international financial institutions have become partners in promoting ethnocide and genocide in Pakistan.

During PM Modi's visit a few weeks ago, the White House issued a joint statement indicating cooperation between both countries to identify and designate terrorist organizations. This is an important step toward containing Pakistan-led terrorism, particularly in the districts of Kashmir controlled by Pakistan, where minority-hating terrorists hide and train.

The US government's ambiguous stance on Kashmir, labeling it disputed and not part of India, benefits China and Pakistan far more than the people of Kashmir. It breathes new life into terrorism as the military allocates taxpayer funds for this purpose, which the country's declining economy cannot afford. It also allows China to amass troops on the Gilgit-Baltistan border and extend support to the terrorist groups in Kashmir, further complicating and prolonging the conflict. By doing so, President Biden is offering China the long arms to enjoy easy and continuous access to the south of the Himalayas and the Arabian Sea.

It is past due for President Biden to change this policy and end China's stranglehold on the region, or he will be remembered as the president who aided and abetted America's most dangerous adversary.

Presbyterian pastor survives assassination attempt after erasing Islamic writings from church wall

[CLAAS](#) (05.09.2023) - On September 3rd, a disturbing incident unfolded in Faisalabad, casting a spotlight on the vulnerability of religious minorities in the region. The target of this violence was none other than Presbyterian Pastor Eleazar Sindhu, also known as Vicky, who faced an attack for his decision to remove Islamic writings from the external wall of his church. The incident occurred as Pastor Vicky, accompanied by his colleague John Masih, was returning home to Rehmat Town after conducting a church service in the nearby village of Kariwala, Chak No. 100.

Recounting the event, Pastor Vicky shared that during a break, a man with a beard abruptly confronted him, demanding that he recite the Kalma (the Islamic declaration of faith). However, instead of complying, Pastor Vicky began reciting the Apostle's Creed. This action angered the Muslim man, who then fired a shot at him and quickly fled the scene. Calling out to his colleague John for assistance and with the arrival of onlookers, the emergency service 15 was called. Pastor Vicky was promptly transported to Civil Hospital for medical treatment. Thankfully, Pastor Vicky survived the gunshot wound and is now in stable condition.

The motive behind this attack stems from Pastor Vicky's decision to erase Islamic writings from the front wall of the Satyana Road Presbyterian Church. On August 28th, a church member informed him that Arabic writings had been inscribed on the church wall. Upon inspection, Pastor Vicky discovered Islamic text accompanied by derogatory

remarks directed at him, reading "Vicky ملعون" (Maloon), which translates to "Execrable" in English.

The news of the incident quickly spread in the area, causing fear and anxiety among the local Christian community. This raised concerns about the safety of Pastor Vicky, his congregation, and fellow Christians in the vicinity. Pastor Vicky disclosed that at least four churches of their denomination had already been destroyed in Jaranwala.

Responding to the situation, Pastor Vicky and his congregation reported the incident to the local police on the same day. A police team arrived on-site and decided to personally remove the inscriptions from the church wall. However, aware of potential repercussions, Pastor Vicky recorded a video message beforehand. In the video, he showcased that neither he nor any other church member was responsible for the removal; instead, the task was being carried out by Muslim police officers. He also addressed the situation, emphasizing that religion should be promoted through actions and treatment to others, rather than coercion.

The video footage captured the moment a police officer applied paint to the inscriptions on the church wall. This step aimed to de-escalate the situation and prevent further complications. Despite the intended outcome, those attempting to sow chaos faced a setback, as their intended target shifted.

In his hospital statement, Pastor Vicky revealed that he recognized the assailant who shot him upon seeing him. The same individual had threatened him a few days earlier.

While Pastor Vicky is currently out of immediate danger, the incident underscores the persistent risks and obstacles endured by religious minorities in the region. This occurrence is not isolated but follows the August 16th attack in Jaranwala, where at least 25 churches were targeted, and false blasphemy allegations were lodged against Christians. Despite the police's diligent efforts to restore stability in Jaranwala and its surroundings, Christians remain cautious and are hesitant to return to their homes, despite assurances from law enforcement.

The attack on Pastor Vicky has reignited concerns and propagated a sense of fear among the local Christian community. It's essential for both the police and the government to intensify their endeavours to reestablish peace and security in Jaranwala and the adjacent areas.

Nasir Saeed, Director of CLAAS-UK, strongly condemned the assassination attempt on Pastor Eleazar and called for justice against those responsible for both defacing the church wall and targeting him. He voiced his strong opposition to the escalating instances of blasphemy allegations against Christians and the consequent harassment they endure in the name of religion. Saeed emphasized the urgency to put an end to such actions and urged the government to take robust measures to counter the intensifying hostility directed at Christians. He underscored the government's duty to firmly address individuals who propagate hate, potentially necessitating the reinforcement of legal measures. Protecting all citizens, particularly the vulnerable religious minorities, stands as a paramount responsibility for the government.

Saeed further said that these incidents reflect a systematic campaign aimed at compelling Christians to leave Pakistan. He characterized these acts as part of a broader plans that seeks to eliminate Christianity from the country—a disconcerting trend he referred to as the gradual genocide of Christians in Pakistan. He stressed the need for swift, unyielding action to prevent irreversible outcomes.

The Christian leadership had supported Quaid-e-Azam's vision of a separate Pakistani state, where equal citizenship rights were promised. Regrettably, Christians have never been treated as equals in Pakistan. They are now being coerced to flee, with their towns and churches set ablaze, yet justice remains elusive. Monetary compensation alone is insufficient; thorough investigations into incidents are necessary, and perpetrators must be brought to justice to deter further attacks.

In light of these events, the recommendations of investigations, whether through Joint Investigation Teams (JIT) or judicial commissions, must be diligently implemented.

Quaid-e-Azam had envisioned a modern democratic welfare state, where religion was separated from state affairs. Unfortunately, ongoing attempts persist to transform Pakistan into a theocratic state—directly opposing Quaid-e-Azam's vision. Saeed urged Pakistan to make a decisive choice between upholding a democratic structure or embracing a theocratic model for the nation's future.

Leading Shiite cleric arrested based on new blasphemy law

"Bitter Winter" correctly predicted that new penalties against those who "offend the wives and companions of the Prophet" were intended for cracking down on Shiites.

By Massimo Introvigne

[Bitter Winter](#) (06.09.2023) - We wish we had been wrong. But we weren't. After a test case against [a Sunni retired teacher](#), Pakistan amended last month Article 298-A of its Criminal Code, which is part of its blasphemy laws and punishes those who disrespect "the Prophet's wives, family, close companions, and the Righteous Caliphs." The penalty passed from one month to three years in jail to a minimum of ten years to life imprisonment, plus a fine of one million rupees.

["Bitter Winter" reported](#) that the government had amended Article 298-A under pressure from radical anti-Shiite Sunni movements, and that Shiites would risk severe jail penalties. In fact, in Shia literature one can find curses against Aisha, the third and youngest wife of Muhammad, for her role in denying that Ali, whom the Shiites regard as their founder, was the legitimate successor of the Prophet, and against those companions of the Prophet who sided against Ali.

We were not alarmist, and what we denounced as a possibility has already happened, as soon as the new law entered into force. A prominent Shiite cleric, Agha Baqir al-Hussaini, was arrested in Skardu, the largest city in the Gilgit-Baltistan region.

He had presided a meeting in mid-August denouncing the new law and stating that Shiites cannot and will not renounce their criticism of those relatives and companions of the Prophet who denied Ali's succession. As a result, on August 22, local Sunnis took to the street demanding his arrest.

The Shiite cleric was [arrested at the end of August](#). The arrest generated new and larger protests in Skardu, this time by Shiites. It was the largest protest in the history of the city of Skardu.

Demonstrations became national, as documented on social media, creating a serious risk of sectarian violence.

All this was highly predictable when the blasphemy law was amended. However, the Pakistani government [preferred to humor](#) the radical fundamentalists of [Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan](#) rather than protecting religious minorities and avoid inter-Islamic conflict.

Spate of false blasphemy charges put Pakistani Christians at risk

CLAAS (30.08.2023) - In the aftermath of the horrific assault on Christians in Jaranwala, a disturbing series of false blasphemy cases have emerged in Pakistan, casting a harsh light on the rampant abuse of blasphemy laws and the ensuing violence against minority communities. On August 25, 2023, a troubling incident unfolded in Kasur's Mochipura area, where a sanitation worker's family was falsely accused of desecrating Quranic papers while cleaning a Muslim household. Tensions escalated as Islamic clerics called for attacks on Christian homes through mosque loudspeakers. Thankfully, swift police intervention averted a potential catastrophe, ensuring the safety of the Christian community.

These events follow a grim pattern. On August 16, 2023, Jaranwala city witnessed a violent rampage by a Muslim mob, resulting in the burning of 25 churches and the destruction of 120 houses, leaving numerous Christian families homeless and terrified. This attack, triggered by the arrest of Christian brothers Raja Amir Saleem and Rocky Saleem on blasphemy charges, starkly highlights the alarming misuse of blasphemy laws. Similarly, tensions flared in Sahiwal due to blasphemous content on social media, prompting police action and the filing of a First Information Report (FIR).

Merely three days after the Jaranwala incident, another potential blasphemy crisis was narrowly averted in Sahiwal. In the village of 186/9-L, a Christian named Ehsaan Shan Masih posted a video containing blasphemous images on social media, reminiscent of the material that triggered the Jaranwala attacks. The local Dera Rahim police station acted swiftly, registering an FIR under sections 295A and B of the Pakistan Penal Code, along with provisions under the Anti-Terrorism Act 1997, to prevent potential violence. While Ehsaan has not been arrested yet, his relatives and neighbours have fled their homes, fearing the dire consequences witnessed in Jaranwala.

Additionally, in Madina Town, Faisalabad, damp Quranic pages left on a shared wall sparked accusations against a Christian family, forcing some members to flee their homes out of fear of mob violence. A family dispute in Rawalpindi escalated into a blasphemy case when a family member converted to Islam and accused his nephew to claim property shares. Though the police managed to diffuse the situation, rumours persisted, continuing to threaten local Christians.

In another case, an FIR was registered on August 20, 2023, at the Garanna police station, Sargodha, against unidentified individuals who allegedly desecrated pages of the Holy Quran. Irfan Taj, a resident of Chak No. 36, Sargodha, reported that during Fajar Namaz (Early Morning Prayer) at Bilal Mosque, he discovered a polythene bag hanging on the mosque's main gate containing burnt pages of Sapara No. 2 (Quranic verses). Police have filed a case against unknown perpetrators.

Reports from our partners in Pakistan also indicate continued harassment of Christians across the country. Incidents include the writing of Quranic/Islamic words on two churches: Central Brooks Church in Karachi and Presbyterian Church on Satyana Road, Faisalabad.

Recently we have received another report that an Islamic group protested derogatorily against Christians in Mehboob Colony, Faisalabad, on the night of August 29. Chanting offensive slogans and labelling Christians as "Choohras" (a pejorative term often used against Christians) and infidels, the group was dispersed by timely police intervention. However, Christians are still apprehensive, seeking refuge until normalcy is restored.

Nasir Saeed, Director of CLAAS-UK, expressed deep concern over the ongoing situation against Christians in Pakistan. He commended the State's efforts following the Jaranwala attacks but emphasized that such incidents persist with slightly less intensity, warranting serious attention and action. Due to the ongoing incidents, the Christian community across Pakistan now lives under constant fear, aware that baseless blasphemy allegations within their community could lead to revenge-driven attacks.

The government must treat this matter with utmost seriousness, possibly deploying law enforcement personnel in Jaranwala and its surrounding areas to restore calm. The lasting trauma inflicted on these communities necessitates swift governmental support and comprehensive reforms to address this issue.

Pakistan's contentious blasphemy laws contradict the numerous international human rights conventions ratified by the government. The international community consistently voices its concerns, and civil society has once again found its voice, demanding immediate attention to this grave issue. However, despite these disastrous attacks tarnishing Pakistan's global image, the government has failed to promise change or new legislation to combat the misuse of blasphemy laws, especially against Christians.

The current scenario demands the Pakistani government's unequivocal commitment to curbing the ongoing misuse of blasphemy laws against Christians and other religious minorities. Urgent, proactive measures are required to prevent further harassment and violence against the Christian community. Addressing these concerns will reaffirm Pakistan's dedication to protecting minority rights and ensuring their safety.

Pakistan's track record of mistreating religious minorities is well known, and denial by government ministers and politicians fails to improve the situation. The Jaranwala attack has brought to the forefront Pakistan's treatment of minorities and can no longer remain concealed from the world's attention. Urgent action is imperative to halt the ongoing plight of Christians, and the government must actively promote harmony within society. Immediate attention to the reform of blasphemy laws is essential for fostering inclusivity and respect among diverse religious communities.

CLAAS UK, P.O.Box 81, Southall, Middlesex UB2 5YQ, UK - Phone: 020 81506763 - Email: info@claas.org.uk

Children shun school after Pakistan anti-Christian violence

About 600 Christian children have stopped going to school after blasphemy riot in Jaranwala in Punjab province



Slavish Murad, 10, a fifth-grader Christian student is seen with his mother and aunt at their burnt house in Isa Nagri of Jaranwala in Pakistan's Punjab province following a Muslim mob attack. (Photo: Kamran Chaudhry)

By **Kamran Chaudhry** (*)

[UCA NEWS](#) (30.08.2023) - Slavish Murad stopped going to school the day after he returned home and found it was covered with ash and smoke following the anti-Christian violence in Christian neighborhoods in eastern Pakistan.

"I am afraid. All my classmates are Muslims," the ten-year-old told UCA News, adding that he fears his classmates might harm him.

On Aug. 16, a Muslim mob attacked nine settlements in Jaranwala, a Christian neighborhood, and two villages in Faisalabad district of Punjab province, over alleged desecration of the Quran by two local Christians.

Jaranwala is home to about 5,000 Christians, mostly poor and low-paid sanitation workers.

The mob attacked 21 churches and 400 Christian houses, leaving 19 churches and 89 houses completely burned and destroyed.

Murad's house in Isa Nagri, one of the violence-hit settlements, was among those burnt.

After their brick house went up in flames, he stood in front of the doorsteps wearing green trousers and a white-green t-shirt and consoled his crying aunt.

This photo became a trending post on social media sites with various Facebook pages sharing it, drawing hundreds of likes. Various media channels also used the picture to highlight the suffering of the affected community.

Murad's mother Nazia said their family has been having a hard time after all their belongings were destroyed in the violence.

"Murad fainted three times amid humidity," Nazia recalled.

She said it was disappointing that Christians came under attack just two days after they celebrated Pakistan's Independence Day on Aug. 14 with zeal and merriment.

"Now the question is what freedom do we have in this country? If they can do this to our houses, they can do the same to us," she said.

The mother said she had been trying in vain to send Murad back to school.

"The kid doesn't understand. He is afraid of being harmed in school," she added.

The family has made a makeshift tent on the street to pass their days until their house is rebuilt, just like hundreds of homeless Christians.

Most of the burnt houses are still littered with charred belongings including melted utensils.

A visiting Christian family donated a pedestal fan to Murad's family, bringing some comfort to the distraught family amid the hot, humid weather.

Nazia says despite Murad's reluctance, she is not willing to send him to a nearby school run by a Protestant Church because of its poor quality of education.

A local catechist estimated that some 600 children in Jaranwala are reluctant to return to their schools.

Faisalabad Catholic Diocese which covers Punjab, Pakistan's most populous province, runs 11 high schools, six middle schools, and eight primary schools.

However, there are no Catholic schools or convents in Jaranwala, according to the Catholic Board of Education (CBE).

Nadeem Bashir, executive secretary of CBE in Faisalabad said the church plans to hold trauma sessions and workshops for local children from September.

"The area came to our attention after the first Catholic Church was blessed in the settlement called Christian town in 2019," he said.

Bashir regretted that the computer center, located beneath the church, with 15 computers was vandalized by the mob.

Two weeks after the attack, the situation remains tense in Jaranwala.

Hardline Islamist party, Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), and Joint Action Committee Jaranwala, comprising of Bar Association, trade union, political and religious parties, transporters, petrol pumps, and private school associations, observed a shutdown strike over blasphemy allegations.

The groups have hosted banners to express their disapproval of what they say the “harassment and illegal arrests” of Muslims by police in the name of hunting “unknown culprits.”

Jaranwala Bar Association declared on Aug. 26 that it plans to hold protest sit-ins and rallies at the entrance and exit routes of the city, business and trade centers, and its members will wear black armbands.

Shafiq Masih is a wedding videographer whose house was destroyed in a street behind the Catholic Church in Christian Town.

He said that his two children are also afraid to return to school.

“They are mentally upset. They have panic attacks since we escaped the mob heading towards our *basti* (slum). We do not allow them to enter the blackened rooms whose ceiling can cave in any minute,” Masih said.

“Our lives cannot be normal unless the house is reconstructed and it will take months,” he added.

First-grader Rehan Saleem recorded a video of the black ruins of his house located opposite the Catholic Church in Christian town. He urges his aunty to upload the video on her Facebook page when the internet service resumes in the area, home to 250 Christian houses.

“Look at the huge hole in our roof. The people of India and Pakistan must help us in Jaranwala,” Saleem narrates in the video.

“My books have burnt. The House of God is fine now. Our house should be the same,” he told UCA News.

Saima Younas, the aunt of the six-year-old, said Saleem remains traumatized.

“Saleem sometimes screams in his sleep. People are providing us crockery, clothes and household items but there are no doors to keep them safe,” she said.

Bishop Indrias Rehmat of Faisalabad formed the “Christian Joint Action Committee for Jaranwala Incident” on Aug. 26, tasked to coordinate Catholic humanitarian aid to the victims.

The committee’s convenor Father Khalid Rashid Asi said the psycho-social support of the Christian children of affected houses was the biggest concern.

“Children are afraid and not going to schools. A few went but were not accepted. They are being asked to become Muslims and told that no harm will come to them,” the priest said during the committee meeting on Aug. 27.

“We want to adjust them in our hostels, but nobody wants to come there. Denomination is another problem. They prefer institutes of their own churches,” he said.

Children like Murad are still traumatized by the violent attack.

“The scene of them setting our house on fire and chasing us still haunts me,” he said.
“They might burn me like they burned our house.”

(*) Kamran Chaudhry, based in Lahore city, reports issues of religion, social justice and human rights from Pakistan. A journalist of more than 15 years, he also contributes videos and commentaries.

Fact-finding mission to Jaranwala finds local Muslim religious leaders complicit in attacks against Christians

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) investigated the issue on the spot. The report can be accessed [here](#)

By Hina Jilani, chairperson

[HRCP](#) (25.08.2023) - According to a fact-finding mission initiated by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), at least 24 churches and several dozen smaller chapels as well as scores of houses in Jaranwala were torched and looted in a series of brutal mob-led attacks against the local Christian community on 16 August 2023. Following rumours and allegations of blasphemy against a Christian man and subsequent calls for action by Muslims from mosque loudspeakers, thousands of men gathered in the town and proceeded to attack Christian churches and homes.

Comprising HRCP chairperson Hina Jilani, Centre for Social Justice executive director Peter Jacob, senior Women's Action Forum member Neelam Hussain, and historian and rights activist Dr Yaqoob Bangash, the mission has also said that it 'cannot rule out the suspicion that this was not a spontaneous or random crowd [that led the attacks], but part of a larger campaign of hatred against the local Christians.'

The mission has said that, while it fully recognises the operational difficulties that the police may have confronted in a small town with meagre administrative and law enforcement resources to deal with a situation of widespread violence, there are concerns with respect to the timeliness of the response as well as weaknesses in the strategy employed to restrain the crowd.

The mission recommends reviewing the blasphemy laws so that they are not misused against individuals or any religious minority. Additionally, policies and strategies to deal with organised extremist groups should be devised, especially with regard to enforcement of law and order, so that such groups are neither able nor allowed to undermine the writ of the state.

The mission urges the Punjab government to take measures to implement the recommendations of the judicial inquiry held after the communal riots in Gojra in 2009 so that there is no impunity for organised Muslim religious groups that openly declare their intentions of violent action against religious minorities. The government must also take stern action against any instances of hate speech against any community.

The government needs to take urgent measures to compensate the victim community and rebuild the Christian neighbourhoods damaged in Jaranwala. The compensation money must be commensurate with the damage and disbursed swiftly. The administration must publicly clarify that the transfer of the assistant commissioner, a Christian, was not due to any fault on his part but was done to protect him and his family.

The directive of the 2014 Supreme Court judgment calling for a separate police force to be created to protect religious minorities' places of worship must be implemented urgently, and the financial and human resources needed to do this made available without any further delay.

Human Rights Commission of Pakistan
Aiwan-i-Jamhoor, 107 Tipu Block, New Garden Town
Lahore 54600, Pakistan
Phone: +92 42 3586 4994, 3583 8341, 3586 5969
Fax: +92 42 3588 3582
Email: hrcp@hrcp-web.org

Jaranwala attacks part of larger hate campaign against Christians, HRCP reveals

[KrossKonnection](#) (25.08.2023) - The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) on Friday said it suspected that the Jaranwala rioters were not a "spontaneous or random crowd", but a part of a "larger campaign of hatred against local Christians".

On August 16, a violent mob of hundreds ransacked and torched nearly two dozen churches, attacked the homes and businesses of the Christian community, and the office of the local assistant commissioner in Jaranwala.

According to estimates compiled by Faisalabad's district administration, at least 22 churches ransacked by mobs suffered damages to the tune of Rs29.1 million whereas 91 houses, which bore the brunt of the violence, suffered losses to the tune of Rs38.5m.

As per police and local sources, the violence erupted after some locals alleged that several desecrated pages of the Holy Quran were found near a house at Cinema Chowk in Jaranwala, where two Christian brothers resided.

A day after the incident, Punjab caretaker Chief Minister Moshin Naqvi said that "both main accused" in the case were arrested and in the custody of the Counter Terrorism Department.

Many more arrests have been made in connection with the incident since.

In its fact-finding report published today, the commission said police officers in Jaranwala had confirmed that some "Muslim religious groups have raised issues that have created communal tension in the near past".

"The mission has also learnt that several videos made during the attacks in different localities of Jaranwala are in circulation, showing members of a particular religious political party inciting the crowd to violence.

"Other factors reported above indicate that there could be larger political and social motives behind the attack," it said.

The fact-finding mission comprised HRCP chairperson Hina Jilani, Centre for Social Justice Executive Director Peter Jacob, senior Women's Action Forum member Neelam Hussain, and historian and rights activist Dr Yaqoob Bangash.

According to the report, several witnesses stated that those who committed the arson were not from the city itself but had come from adjoining villages.

"One person attested that a tractor trolley full of people as well as several persons on motorbikes had arrived from a village, transporting men who then burnt down a church and houses, thus giving more credibility to the notion that the attack was premeditated."

It highlighted that the HRCP mission's inspection of the damage by fire points towards "planned arson and deliberate desecration of religious symbols", even though the looting of homes may have been more opportunistic.

The report also said that some Muslim residents of Jaranwala helped evacuate residents of the neighbourhoods that came under attack. "In Cinema Basti, neighbours from the Shia community came to victims' aid the day their neighbourhood was attacked," it revealed.

POLICE'S ROLE

On the role of the local police, HRCP said information gathered by its mission raised concerns with respect to the "timeliness of the response as well as weaknesses in the strategy employed by law enforcement personnel to restrain the crowd and limit the spread of its mischief and violence".

"It appears that the local SP (superintendent of police) was unable to assess the seriousness of the situation and did not fully apprise himself of the situation that was brewing outside while he was closeted with those who were in negotiations focused on demands for the arrest of the persons accused of blasphemy. It is unfortunate that he remained uninformed of the announcements from mosques and of crowds coming into town from outlying villages.

"It is our considered opinion that there was an inexplicable holding back on the part of the police despite clear evidence of the level of violence that merited the use of force proportionate to the havoc that these crowds were creating. Neither tear gas nor any other methods to restrain or disperse the mob seem to have been deployed in any of the affected localities," it stated.

The report also highlighted the 10-hour delay in the arrival of Rangers in the area, saying that it "gave the mobs enough time to go on a rampage against churches, houses, and one cemetery".

Furthermore, HRCP said it found the transfer of Jaranwala's Christian assistant commissioner after the attack "highly objectionable".

Noting the arrests made in the aftermath of the violence, the commission said "local political leaders who incited and led the violence have yet to be booked".

RECOMMENDATIONS

Providing a list of recommendations, the HRCP called on the authorities to review blasphemy laws so that they could not be misused against minorities and demanded that they provide punishment for making false accusations.

"The mission urges the Punjab government to take measures to implement the recommendations of the judicial inquiry held after the communal riots in Gojra in 2009

so that there is no impunity for organised Muslim religious groups that openly declare their intentions of violent action against religious minorities.

"The government must also take stern action against any instances of hate speech against any community," the report emphasised.

After the 2009 massacre, in which seven Christians in Gojra were burnt alive over blasphemy allegations, a tribunal had recommended reviewing five provisions of the blasphemy law.

The HRCP further said in its report that the government needed to take urgent measures to swiftly compensate the Christian community in Jaranwala, rebuild the damaged neighbourhoods, take action against hate speech, and make efforts to build inter-faith harmony.

"The administration must publicly clarify that the transfer of the assistant commissioner, a Christian, was not due to any fault on his part but was done to protect him and his family," the HRCP further demanded.

"The directive of the 2014 Supreme Court judgment calling for a separate police force to be created to protect religious minorities' places of worship must be implemented urgently, and the financial and human resources needed to do this made available without any further delay," the report added.

Religious intolerance is burning Pakistan

The recent mob violence against Christian minorities in Punjab province is just the latest reminder of how deep and wide the roots of religious intolerance have grown.

By Mariyam Suleman Anees

[The Diplomat](#) (25.08.2023) - In 2017, a 23-year-old university student, [Mashal Khan](#), was killed in mob violence over allegations of blasphemy in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. Since the lynching occurred within his university's premises, the case became a topic of heated discussion in universities and educational institutions across the country. It sparked a debate over increasing religious intolerance and the misuse of blasphemy laws in Pakistan.

But the debate and discussion back then appears to have borne no results.

On August 7, Abdul Rauf, a young teacher in Turbat, a town in Balochistan province, [was killed by unknown armed men](#) on blasphemy allegations. "He was on his way to attend a *jirga* (a traditional assembly) of *ulema* (religious leaders) to explain his position, but he was shot before he could do so," Sadia Baloch (named changed), a student activist in Balochistan told The Diplomat.

Killings and mob violence following blasphemy allegations are not new in Pakistan. Indeed, over the decades, hundreds of people have been falsely accused and many killed in targeted sectarian attacks.

Pakistan is a largely Sunni Muslim country, with significant religious and sectarian minority populations, including Shia Muslims, Christians and Hindus. Ahmedis, who are declared non-Muslim by the state, are perhaps the worst targets of persecution.

In Quetta, the capital of Balochistan, Shias are often targets of violence, while the [Ahmedi](#) community is [treated as heretics](#). Hindus and Christians, especially from the lower-ranked castes, face extreme violence as well.

Young rural girls of the Hindu community from Pakistan's southwestern province of Sindh have reportedly been abducted and [forced into religious conversion and marriage](#). In the rare instance of such cases making their way into the media spotlight and land before the courts, judges usually rule that the conversion was out of choice and voluntary. The women are forced to live with their abusers for the rest of their lives.

There is no comparison when it comes to deciding which form of violence based on religious intolerance is worse. While forced conversion and targeted sectarian killings have affected millions in the country, misuse of blasphemy laws, vigilantism, lynching, personal vendettas, [burning down entire communities, and destroying places of worship](#) are all human rights crises and symptomatic of collective social disorder.

According to a 2021 [United States Commission on International Religious Freedom](#) report, instances of mob violence and criminal charges over religious issues are more common in Pakistan than anywhere else.

One of the reasons is that the country's law and order system has a poor record of protecting citizens, especially those from minority communities.

But the system outdid itself in mid-August when police failed to prevent or halt armed and rampaging mobs, who attacked the Christian community in [Jaranwala](#) in Punjab province, attacking, looting and setting ablaze their houses, churches and businesses.

It all [began when several](#) pages of the Quran were discovered near the Christian community with alleged blasphemous content inscribed on them. According to reports, the pages were taken to a local religious leader, who urged protest and demanded the arrest of the culprits. But before the matter could be further investigated, armed men marched into the Christian neighborhood and unleashed violence.

"[The mob] managed to destroy an entire community and their places of worship, this must have taken several hours," Waiza Rafique a lawyer in Lahore says. "The question is, how come the police and the law enforcement agencies only arrived when most of the damage was already [done]?"

Pakistani society underwent a process of Islamization beginning in the 1980s, when General Zia used religion to legitimize his military coup. It resulted in the Islamization of Pakistani society and its institutions.

"Religion is deeply entrenched in all our institutions. It is embedded in politics, education and the media," Sadia Baloch said, pointing out that "there is no proper understanding of the religious scriptures, but a mere indoctrinating of masses towards extremism."

The [origin](#) of Pakistan's blasphemy law is often traced back to the British colonial era, but it was hardly used until the 1970s. The law was strengthened during the [Islamization of the state](#) during Zia's regime.

According to [Pakistan's penal code](#), "derogatory remarks, etc., in respect of the Holy Prophet [Muhammad] either spoken or written, or by visible representation, or by any imputation, innuendo or insinuation, directly or indirectly shall be punished with death, or imprisonment for life, and shall also be liable to fine." People have often misused this to settle personal disputes. In such cases, even before any investigation begins, vigilantes take the law into their hands and go on a rampage.

Although laws in Pakistan also [prohibit discrimination on account of religion](#), these are rarely implemented. What is more, police and other law enforcement agencies are not trained to handle vigilante mobs.

There are several initiatives at the community level to defuse tensions before they explode into violence.

According to Elaine Alam, a human rights practitioner based in Lahore, "Women from the Hindu and Christian minorities collectively mediate and solve local issues, preventing them from turning into disputes or preventing disputes from turning into inter-religious violent conflict."

However, political institutions and the criminal justice system have yet to take any practical steps to curb violence at the societal level. False allegations of blasphemy, mob lynching, marginalization and persecution based on religion are triggering alarming levels of religious violence. There is an urgent need for reforms in the education, social and criminal justice systems.

Photo: A Christian woman weeps after looking at her home vandalized by an angry Muslim mob in Jaranwala in the Faisalabad district, Pakistan, Thursday, Aug, 17, 2023. Credit: AP Photo/K.M.Chaudary

In Pakistan, religious freedom is withering

BY KNOX THAMES

[The Hill](#) (25.08.2023) - The [torching of churches](#) in Pakistan has brought to global attention the dire state for religious minorities in that troubled country.

Matters related to blasphemy represent health and safety hazards for all involved, Muslim and non-Muslim alike. But the threats to minorities are particularly acute, as demonstrated by unchecked mobs ransacking churches and Christian homes in the town of Jaranwala over false allegations of blasphemy.

Pakistan has the notorious distinction of having the harshest blasphemy law in the world, with dozens and dozens jailed. [According to observers](#), "so far this year, at least 59 cases of blasphemy have been reported, while four individuals have been murdered under such allegations."

But radicals want more.

Elections are horrible times for religious minorities, and especially so in Pakistan. The country's political upheavals continue with no end in sight, [as the sentencing](#) of former Prime Minister Imran Khan to three years in jail will bring little calm, further exacerbating political conflict and dysfunction. In this turmoil, extremists, aided and abetted by authorities, continue to attack those who believe differently, with increasingly little hope for state protection.

[With elections called](#), the likelihood of increased attacks runs high as politicians scramble to court the extremist vote.

Already this year, the extremist political party Tehreek-e-Labbaik (TLP) successfully pushed for harsher penalties, and politicians responded. To head off TLP's long march on Islamabad, then-Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif signed off in June on a [12-point agreement](#) that would, among other things, create a counter-blasphemy wing within the Federal Investigation Agency and establish a social media filter to remove blasphemous content.

But that wasn't enough. In August, the Senate [passed a law](#) increasing, to 10 years to life in prison, the penalty for blasphemy deemed to insult Muhammad's companions, wives and family members. Other bills that gave [sweeping powers](#) to Pakistan's all-powerful military were also rushed through. Although many consider the blasphemy system to be already rife with corruption and abuse, politicians did not bother to incorporate reforms into the process. Instead, they cut procedural corners and rushed the bill through the lower and upper house, to the point that Pakistan's Human Rights Minister, Riaz Hussain Pirzada, [wrote Sharif expressing concern](#) about the process used to pass the bill. In doing so, Pirzada risked his own safety, as ministers [have been killed for less](#).

Religious freedom watchdog [CSW also fretted](#) that the legislation was "approved without debate by Pakistan's parliament despite the fact that existing blasphemy legislation has resulted in extra-judicial killings and countless incidents of mob violence based on false accusations."

The mob attacks followed on Aug. 16, with advocates reporting 19 churches entirely burned out and 89 Christian homes destroyed. Based on past experience, mob leaders have little fear of punishment, [despite authorities arresting](#) more than 100 individuals for suspected involvement. Authorities also charged two Christians for alleged blasphemous activity. It is much more likely the two Christians will spend years in jail than any of the vandals who torched churches and homes.

Bishop Azad Marshall of the Church of Pakistan [called for an "end](#) to Judicial Apartheid through the fair and equal application of laws between the majority and minority populations" at a press conference with Muslim leaders. Similarly, Pakistani Catholic cleric Michael Nazir-Ali [wrote that the attacks](#) are "the result of legal extremism as in the blasphemy laws and their misuse, the changing of mentalities through the teaching of hate in books, and appeasing extremist movements in their demands for more extremist measures." He concluded, "Christians will not be the only community to be targeted."

One example is the ongoing destruction of Ahmadi Muslim places of worship and graveyards across Pakistan. Hated by extremists and discriminated against by the state, neither the Ahmadis nor their sanctuaries nor cemeteries are safe. The community has tracked [15 attacks](#) on their mosques and cemeteries this year. Authorities rarely, if ever, intervene to stop these attacks, and those who assault are never held to account, thus contributing to a climate of impunity.

Even worse, in four instances this year, the police themselves tore down the minarets. In increasingly radicalized Pakistan, Ahmadis are the perfect scapegoat. It is politically smart to court the anti-Ahmadi vote, or at least to be silent about the Ahmadis' precarious situation.

In theory, Pakistani law protects different religious practices. The torching of churches just days after Pakistan's 76th anniversary of nationhood is a tragic indictment of the country's health.

Many politicians and generals quoted the nation's founding father, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, during events. But Jinnah had spoken about religious minorities at the Constituent Assembly in 1947: "You are free; you are free to go to your temples; you are free to go to your mosques or to any other places of 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."

Unfortunately, those words are honored in the breach while churches burn and Ahmadi mosques are dismantled.

Amid Pakistan's political turmoil and with elections on the horizon, any hope of reform has disappeared for now. In fact, things could get worse. Politicians will be tempted to play to base instincts about faith and flag, drawing the lines narrowly around certain theologies while excluding others.

Already, a Quran-burning in Sweden has resulted in mass [protests in Pakistan](#). Seeing the results of such emotive issues, extremist parties such as TLP will push their extreme agenda, likely forcing more mainline parties to lurch rightward to compete for this vote in a tight election.

The church burnings are not an outlier but a symptom of repression and discrimination that is aided and abetted by the state. While positive Pakistan's political leadership [expressed solidarity](#), [visited the Christian](#) community, and [condemned the violence](#), election seasons present politicians opportunities to curry favor with extremists. In Pakistan's unstable environment, religious minorities provide useful strawmen for creating scapegoats and justifying promises of "reform." One party will win, but without real reform and accountability for violence, religious minorities will lose regardless of the outcome.

Photo: Pakistani Christians hold a demonstration condemning the recent attack on a Christian area by an angry Muslim mob, In Peshawar, Pakistan, Sunday, Aug. 20, 2023. AP Photo/Mohammad Sajjad

Mosques probed over protest call in Pakistan blasphemy riots

A Muslim cleric is among a dozen people being investigated for using mosque loudspeakers to order protests against alleged blasphemy by Christians which erupted into mob violence in Pakistan earlier this week, a senior police official said.

[France 24](#) (19.08.2023) - More than 80 Christian homes and 19 churches were vandalised when hundreds rampaged through a Christian neighbourhood in Jaranwala in Punjab province on Wednesday.

Reports that a Koran had been desecrated were broadcast from mosques, with one cleric telling his followers it was "Better to die if you don't care about Islam".

"That cleric should have understood that when you gather people in such a charged environment... in a country in which people were already very sensitive about

(blasphemy) it is like adding fuel to fire," Punjab police chief Usman Anwar told AFP during an interview in Lahore on Friday.

"He's not saying that go and burn their houses. But when the mob gathers, it's really impossible to control that."

He said the cleric was one of 12 people who were being investigated for using mosque loudspeakers, while more than 125 people have been arrested linked to the vandalism that followed, thanks to the use of facial recognition technology, mobile phone geo-fencing and data gathered from social media.

At its peak, more than 5,000 people had poured into the neighbourhood from other districts, with smaller mobs spreading to narrow alleys where they ransacked homes.

Christians who fled in their hundreds have criticised police for failing to protect their property, with some sheltered by their Muslim neighbours.

"If police had started baton charging or attacking (the mob) or tear gassing that would have resulted in multiple injuries or deaths. And that is what we were avoiding at that time. That would have aggravated the situation that would have spread in all the country," Anwar said.

Negotiations with religious leaders led to calls for calm, he added.

Thousands of churches guarded

Two Christian brothers have been arrested for blasphemy, after torn pages of the Koran with offensive words scrawled across them were stuck to the walls of a mosque in Jaranwala in the early hours of Wednesday morning.

Anwar said he personally interrogated the pair to avoid the possibility of accusations of torture.

On Friday, 3,200 churches were guarded by police across Punjab province to provide reassurance to the Christian community, Anwar said, adding that he would travel to Jaranwala Sunday to show solidarity.

Christians, who make up around two percent of the population, occupy one of the lowest rungs in Pakistani society and are frequently targeted with spurious blasphemy allegations.

The majority of those accused of blasphemy in Pakistan are Muslims, but members of religious minorities face an especially acute threat, according to rights groups.

Blasphemy is an incendiary charge in deeply conservative, Muslim-majority Pakistan, where even unproven allegations of insulting Islam and its Prophet Mohammed can provoke death at the hands of vigilantes.

Politicians have been assassinated, lawyers murdered and students lynched over accusations of blasphemy.

In one of Pakistan's most high-profile cases, Christian woman Asia Bibi was at the centre of a decade-long blasphemy row, which eventually saw her death sentence overturned and ended with her fleeing the country.

Her case sparked violent demonstrations and high-profile assassinations while spotlighting religious extremism across wide sections of Pakistani society.

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan said the number and size of the attacks "appear to have increased in recent years".

Anwar said that while the anger towards blasphemy may be justified, the violent reactions were not, describing the scenes in Jaranwala as "tragic".

He said it was the role of clerics and the government to ensure that religion was not misused.

"The most important thing is that we, the Muslims, in this country, are going to become more tolerant. Once we are given the true message of Islam, that is the role of the government," he said.

A country wracked by crises sees a sharp rise in religious intolerance

Few levers seen to lower sectarian tensions in nuclear-armed Pakistan

By [Andrew Salmon](#) - The Washington Times - Friday, August 18, 2023

LONDON — In [Pakistan](#), a nuclear-armed country beset by murderous terrorism, natural disasters and governmental dysfunction, an argument in a mechanic's shop might seem of trifling consequence.

Tell that to [Ashfaq Masih](#).

Mr. [Masih](#), a Christian motorcycle repairman in the city of Lahore, argued with a Muslim customer after the latter demanded a discount because of his religious piety. Mr. Masih's response was that the customer's religion was not an issue.

response landed the mechanic, who has a wife and daughter, in jail in 2017. This July, his conviction, under blasphemy laws, was upgraded to the death sentence.

And despite international concern about the state of religious intolerance in the overwhelmingly Muslim nation, lawmakers earlier this month moved to strengthen those laws.

In the explosive environment of today's [Pakistan](#), religious intolerance is easily overlooked. But it is severe: The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, [in its 2022 report on Pakistan](#), pointed to both extremism and problematic laws.

In just the latest episode, Muslims in the eastern province of Punjab rioted this week over unsubstantiated rumors that a Christian man had desecrated the Quran, demolishing the man's house, burning churches and damaging several other homes.

The violence prompted the government to deploy added police forces and send in the army to help restore order, with more than 125 people detained in the wake of the violence, and brought more international scrutiny to [Pakistan](#)'s religious laws.

"Violence against Pakistani Christians is a stark example of the threat that blasphemy laws pose to religious freedom," said Mohamed Magid of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, known as USCIRF. "We are concerned that efforts to strengthen these laws will exacerbate violence against religious minorities."

The legal and political issues intertwine, making the problem worse, analysts say.

"[Pakistan](#) has experienced a significant number of cases involving harsh, religious-based court judgments in recent years," said [Nasir Saeed](#) of the Centre for Legal Aid, Assistance and Settlement (CLAAS), a nonprofit organization working for Pakistani Christians persecuted for their faith. "Factors such as societal dynamics, the influence of extremist ideologies and gaps in legal frameworks contribute to the prevalence of such judgments."

It is not only Christians who are suffering in Sunni-majority [Pakistan](#): So are non-Sunni Muslims and Hindus.

The fearsome possibility that nuclear-armed [Pakistan](#) is edging toward chaos may shove the domestic state of religious freedom to the back burner for policymakers. But religious rights advocates warn that neglect could be a dangerous mistake.

"Religious freedom means respecting moral authorities that transcend and are not controlled by the state," said Aaron Rhodes, a human rights activist and author.

Noting that the concept evolved following murderous religious conflicts in 15th- and 16th-century Europe, Mr. Rhodes continued: "Religious freedom can rightly be called the first freedom — not only because it protects individual moral choice, but because it opened the political path for the legal protection of minorities and for political pluralism."

Operating with impunity

The Pakistani Constitution establishes Islam as the official state religion and requires all legal provisions to be consistent with Islam, [notes a 2022 U.S. State Department report](#).

Adherents of minority religions are threatened by "Sunni Islamist extremism and the continued threat of persecution via discriminatory legislation such as the blasphemy laws," according to USCIRF. "These laws have enabled and encouraged Islamist extremists to operate with impunity, easily targeting religious minorities or those with differing beliefs."

Religious intolerance in [Pakistan](#) takes multiple formats.

Last December, a Hindu teen was reportedly arrested and charged with blasphemy after questioning God in a Facebook post, according to Pakistani media reports. The boy was apparently dismayed by the trafficking of females.

Non-Sunni Muslims are similarly victimized. Nasim Malik, general secretary of the International Human Rights Committee, lists a range of assaults and indignities suffered by Ahmadiyya, or Ahmadi, Muslims.

They are forbidden from identifying as Muslims and from practicing their beliefs. Many are banned from public life through discriminatory employment laws. Ahmadi children have been refused education, and women suffer discrimination due to their Ahmadi dress.

In July, Ahmadi gravestones were shattered in an attack on a cemetery — the latest in a series, ongoing for years, “that mean Ahmadis are not free from persecution even after their death,” Mr. Malik said.

In 2022, the USCIRF survey said, six leaders of minority religions were assassinated. Lynchings and stonings have been committed by mobs over blasphemy allegations, and forced conversion is an issue for all non-Sunni groups.

The Pakistani government has not to date executed anyone under blasphemy laws. But court cases see victims lingering in cells for years.

“In cases where individuals face severe sentences for blasphemy, it is crucial to apply various forms of leverage to advocate for a more merciful and just court procedure,” Mr. [Saeed](#) said. “Early court hearings are particularly important, as victims often spend eight to 10 years in prison for crimes they did not commit.”

Courts, in turn, face pressures from powerful fundamentalist Islamic organizations to crack down.

“When there is a case in court, they get together hundreds outside and chant threats outside: ‘You won’t be alive! We will kidnap your children!’” Mr. Malik said.

The 2022 USCIRF report agrees: “Blasphemy laws and anti-Ahmadiyya laws facilitate Islamist extremist elements and support their narrative. ... [Pakistan](#)’s laws further fail to protect religious minorities at increasing risk of abduction, forced marriage and forced conversion to Islam.”

Religious intolerance thrives in an atmosphere of weak governance and a lack of official oversight.

“This is happening only because there is no stable government and no democracy in the country, and as for the judicial system, it is totally paralyzed,” Mr. Malik said. “The fundamentalist clerics have taken power in their hands and say that what they say, the government and everyone has to follow.”

A litany of ill fortune

The world’s second-most populous Muslim state after Indonesia, [Pakistan](#) has been wracked for decades by corruption and instability. Religious and ethnic groups have incubated a range of extremists.

Last year, populist Prime Minister Imran Khan was ousted after being impeached. Intense domestic divisions over the fate of Mr. Khan — climaxing in a bloody assassination attempt earlier this year — simmer ahead of October elections.

[Pakistan](#) is the sixth-ranked state on the [2023 World Terrorism Index](#). Deaths from terrorism in 2022 — 643 — marked a rise of 120 percent over 2021. The country is home to the world's fastest-growing terrorist group, the Balochistan Liberation Army; Balochistan province is the home of the powerful Zikri Muslim minority.

Last year, [Pakistan](#) suffered devastating floods. Economic crisis was averted this July, when the International Monetary Fund approved a \$3 billion bailout. But IMF terms will require strict fiscal discipline amid soaring inflation.

[Pakistan](#) presents a conundrum for the Biden administration, with its domestic turmoil balanced by its geopolitical value. It borders such key nations as Afghanistan, China and Iran, but has conflicted relations with India, the democracy that Washington has wooed as a critical counterweight to rising Chinese influence in Asia.

Targeting blasphemy laws

Amnesty International, one of the world's leading human rights organizations, has lobbied against [Pakistan](#)'s blasphemy laws since 2016.

Nazia Erum, media manager for South Asia at Amnesty's International Secretariat, said the group is not afraid to present its evidence of abuse and discrimination directly to the accused, including religious conservatives in Pakistan and the strict Islamist Taliban regime in Afghanistan.

"We use our analysis to influence and press governments and decision-makers to do the right thing," she said, adding: "We further work with various U.N. mechanisms to hold authorities accountable to uphold international laws and regulations."

But activists say [Pakistan](#)'s laws have been tightened, and information on abuses is difficult to obtain.

The 2023 State Department survey of international religious freedom, released in May, underscored again its criticism of [Pakistan](#)'s record.

"The new government under Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif, which took office in April, weaponized the country's blasphemy laws against former Prime Minister Imran Khan and his cabinet members," the report [stated](#).

"Religious minorities, however, were especially vulnerable to prosecution or violence based on blasphemy allegations in a society that has grown increasingly intolerant of religious diversity.

"Given the current political status of [Pakistan](#) and pressure from religious groups, navigating normal communication channels and applying leverage can be challenging," Mr. Saeed said.

Mr. Malik believes the European Union, which deploys significant aid to [Pakistan](#), and the U.S. military, which has ties to [Pakistan](#)'s military, should use their influence to ease religious intolerance laws.

"We don't expect the international community to use sanctions where a poor Pakistani could feel something in the stomach," he said. "We need sanctions on the political leaders and businessmen and judges and clerics."

Meanwhile, Mr. Masih, the Christian motorcycle mechanic, languishes in prison, according to his wife, who is in touch with CLAAS.

"She frequently visits him, and he is in good health," Mr. Saeed said. "However, there have been no significant developments in his case."

- Andrew Salmon can be reached at asalmon@washingtontimes.com.

Concerns about two bills that increase blasphemy punishment and fail minorities

[CSW](#) (11.08.2023) - CSW is concerned about two Bills passed in Pakistan's legislature that increase the punishment for blasphemy offences, and fail to adequately safeguard minority rights.

The [Criminal Laws \(Amendment\) Act 2023](#) was passed in Pakistan's Senate on 7 August, which increases the punishment for blasphemy offences. On the same day, Pakistan's lower house, the National Assembly, passed the [National Commission for Minorities Bill 2023](#) which fails to adequately safeguard the rights of religious minorities.

The Criminal Laws (Amendment) Act 2023 increases the punishment for insulting the Prophet Mohammed's companions, wives, and family members from three years to life imprisonment, not to be less than ten years. Civil society and minority communities in Pakistan [warned](#) that the legislation could fuel rights abuses and be used to further target religious minorities when it was first approved by the National Assembly in January 2023.

Minority groups in Pakistan have [expressed](#) their concerns that the government has ignored their calls, and a plea from the Human Rights Minister Riaz Hussain Pirzada who in a [letter to Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif](#) in February 2023 requested that the Bill be revisited and reversed.

Pakistan's [blasphemy laws](#) criminalise anyone who insults Islam, including by 'outraging religious feeling', which carries either the death penalty or life imprisonment. These laws are poorly defined and require low standards of evidence. As a result, they are often used as a weapon of revenge against both Muslims and non-Muslims to settle personal scores or to resolve disputes over money, property or business.

Meanwhile, the National Assembly of Pakistan passed the National Commission for Minorities Bill 2023 on 7 August. According to [civil society groups](#) in Pakistan, the bill's provisions are inconsistent with the UN Paris Principles, which outlines how national institutions should promote and protect human rights. The Bill also falls short of meeting the directives of the Pakistan Supreme Court judgement of 19 June 2014, which urged the government to take immediate steps towards enacting a more robust and comprehensive National Commission for Minorities' Rights. While the Bill was passed to address the concerns of minorities, civil society groups assert that it falls short of creating a truly functional, effective, independent, autonomous, and resourceful institution to safeguard minority rights.

CSW's Founder President Mervyn Thomas said: ***'CSW is deeply disappointed by the passage of the Criminal Amendment Act 2023, given the overwhelming evidence of how the existing blasphemy legislation has resulted in extra-judicial killings and countless incidents of mob violence based on false accusations. Making the blasphemy laws more stringent could inflame the situation further and is the opposite of what is needed. The National Commission for Minorities Bill 2023, meanwhile, is a missed opportunity to enact legislation that safeguards the***

rights of religious minorities in Pakistan as policymakers have failed to engage with the demands of civil society organisations and minority community leaders. Pakistan must do more to protect its most vulnerable minority communities by upholding its international obligations and the guarantees enshrined within the country's constitution. The government must also consult and listen to these communities.'

Third blasphemy case in a month sparks unrest, Christians fear for safety in Sargodha

[CLAAS](#) (17.07.2023) - Another blasphemy incident has occurred in the district of Sargodha, Chak no 50, Mariam Town, early morning on July 16th, sending shockwaves throughout the country. This disturbing incident has ignited unrest in the area, leaving Christians deeply concerned for their safety.

Mohd Abdul Gaffar, a retired Pakistan Air Force officer from Green Town, reported that as he was returning home after offering his Fajr prayer (Morning Prayer) along with Qari Muhammad Asif, Imam of the local Mosque Gulzar Habib of Green Town and Ashfaq Ahmad, he discovered a small pamphlet containing blasphemous content on his house boundary wall. The contents of the pamphlet were highly disrespectful towards Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and other revered figures. Shockingly, it also contained derogatory comments against the holy Quran and even praised the recent burning of the Quran in Sweden. Disturbing sketches targeting revered personalities were found as well.

News of the incident spread rapidly in the area, drawing people from far and wide to gather at the location. Outraged and charged, the crowd expressed their anger and frustration, demanding severe punishment for the blasphemer, chanting slogans "gustakh-e-Rasool ki ek hi saza, sar tan se juda sar tan se juda" (The punishment for insulting the Prophet is the separation of the head from the body) as the only suitable punishment for blasphemy.

As time passed, tensions continued to escalate, roads were blocked, and the community demanded swift action and the registration of a case against the blasphemer. Soon afterwards, the police arrived at the scene to calm down the crowd and bring the situation under control. In compliance with the Muslim community's demand, an FIR was registered against unknown individuals under blasphemy sections 295A, 295B, 295c, and 298A.

It is crucial to note that there are several Christian towns in the neighbouring areas, with a Christian population of approximately 4000-5000 individuals. Although the police intervention prevented an immediate attack on Christians, fear still permeates the community. This incident marks the third case of blasphemy in the Sargodha district.

The identity of the perpetrators behind the recent incident remains unknown, although some Muslims believe Christians are responsible.

In response to the situation, the police have decided to maintain a presence in the area to prevent potential attacks on Christian households.

Expressing grave concern, Nasir Saeed, Director of CLAAS-UK, highlighted the escalating situation in Pakistan, particularly in Sargodha, where this third blasphemy incident happened. Haroon Shahzad, a Christian man from Chak no 49, was previously granted

bail but recently had his bail revoked due to objectionable content on his Facebook. Furthermore, in Chak no 98 of the same district, another Christian man, Zaki Masih, was charged under blasphemy law section 295A for allegedly posting blasphemous content.

"The unknown identities of the culprits are cause for alarm, and it is unfortunate that fingers are being pointed towards Christians", Saeed said.

He emphasised that Christians are fully aware of the severe consequences associated with such acts.

They still remember past incidents, including those in Shanti Nagar, Joseph Colony, Gojra, and Korain, where several people were murdered and burnt alive, while dozens of Christians are still languishing in prison, awaiting their fate. It is worth noting that all those accused of committing blasphemy were eventually proven innocent and freed by the court.

Saeed further said that in the recent incident of the burning of the Quran in Sweden, Christians have condemned the act and consistently stood in solidarity with their Muslim brethren.

It is believed

that certain individuals are exploiting the incident of the Quran burning in Sweden as an excuse to seek revenge against local Christians, who are peaceful, believe in the respect of all religions, and have no connection to this incident. They have unequivocally condemned it. Regrettably, some elements within the country aim to fuel the flames of hatred, taking advantage of such situations. The infamous case of Rimsha Masih reminds us how local imam Hafiz Mohammed Khalid Chishti fabricated fake cases against Christians with the intention of driving them out of their communities.

The deepening situation raises significant concerns, necessitating a serious response from the government to restore peace and harmony in the country. It is crucial for the government to take necessary steps to stop the ongoing misuse of the blasphemy law against Christians and other religious minorities in Pakistan.

295-A: Deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs.--Whoever, with deliberate and malicious 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 the 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.

295-B: Defiling etc., of copy of Holy Qur'an.--Whoever wilfully defiles, damages or desecrates a copy of the Holy Qur'an or of an extract therefrom or uses it in any derogatory manner or for any unlawful purpose shall be punishable with imprisonment for life.

Section 295C forbids insults to "the sacred name of the Holy Prophet Muhammad." The minimum penalty is a mandatory life sentence; the maximum penalty is death. In 1990, Pakistan's Federal Shariah Court ruled that the death penalty should be mandatory.

In section 298-A of Pakistan Penal Code, the punishment against the person who disrespects the wives, family and Companions of Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H), imprisonment of with minimum three years period along with a nominal penalty while this is a bailable crime.

Kidnapping, forced marriages, forced conversion

By [Uzay Bulut](#)

[Gatestone Institute](#) (13.07.2023) - Every day in Islamic Pakistan, underage Christian and Hindu girls run the risk of being kidnapped, forcibly converted to Islam, raped, and coerced into a "marriage" with an older or elderly man.

Imagine if you are a child from a persecuted religious minority living in one of the world's most oppressive countries. The country's majority culture and institutions are largely shaped by a religious ideology that has no regard for anything outside that system, as well as a record of mistreating women and girls.

Sadly, the government of Pakistan appears complicit in these and other crimes: it fails to provide women and children with required legal protection. A bill to criminalize forced religious conversions has been presented in the Sindh Assembly at least three times (2016, 2019 and 2021). Each time, it was rejected.

Any military or economic cooperation with Pakistan should be conditioned on Pakistan's improvement of human rights and liberties for minorities, and a respect for international law. A government that is complicit in the abduction, forced religious conversion, sexual abuse and coerced "marriages" of minority children should not be considered qualified to benefit from any aid or cooperation from the West.

Imagine if you are a child from a persecuted religious minority living in one of the world's most oppressive countries. The country's majority culture and institutions are largely shaped by a religious ideology that has no regard for anything outside that system, as well as a record of mistreating women and girls.

Every day you run the risk of being kidnapped, forcibly converted to Islam, raped, and coerced into a "marriage" with an older or elderly man. This is what takes place often in Islamic Pakistan. The victims are Christian and Hindu women and children.

On June 2, 2023, a 14-year-old Hindu girl, Sohana Sharma Kumari, was abducted and married to a Muslim man, [WioNews reported](#) :

"In yet another abduct-and-convert case from Pakistan, a Hindu girl from the country's Sindh province was forcibly converted to Islam and married off, her father said. The 14-year-old girl, identified as Sohana, was kidnapped by her tutor, Akhtar and his accomplices...

"The teen girl's father, Dileep Kumar... claimed that three armed men, Akhtar Gabol, Faizan Jat, and Sarang Khaskheli, broke into their home, stole gold jewelry, and kidnapped Sohana under threat of violence.

"Dileep later filed a complaint with the police. Later, the girl appeared in a video stating clearly under duress that she had converted to Islam and married a Muslim man...

"Although she appeared to be under strain when making her account, the judge postponed the case until June 12 and remanded her to a shelter home for women...

"According to Shiva Kachhi, president of the minority group called Pakistan Darawar Ittehad (PDI), it is rare for a Hindu girl to be returned to her family because the police are typically unwilling to comply, despite the organization's efforts.

"There have been dozens of cases since last year and most of these girls are underage....."

After Kumari reportedly stated that she wanted to be reunited with her family, a Pakistani court finally, on June 12, allowed Kumari to reunite with her parents. According to Indian news media, however, the court [failed to take](#) any concrete steps to protect her from her abductors.

A [report](#) in 2022, entitled "Conversion without Consent: A report on the abductions, forced conversions, and forced marriages of Christian girls and women in Pakistan" issued by the Voice for Justice Organization and the Jubilee Campaign, notes:

"Pakistan is a country with a state religion, Islam, which serves as a source for devising policies, drafting laws, and issuing judgments. The country has a predominantly 200.36 million Muslim population, making up more than 96.47% of the total population (i.e., 207.684 million) while religious minorities comprise around 3.52% (i.e., 7.32 million)."

The report also notes that:

"Many girls between the ages of 12 and 16 years are abducted, 'forcibly converted' to Islam, and then 'forcibly married' to their abductors who typically are twice their victims' ages and are already married with children, though they are presented as bachelors in documents submitted to the courts.

"The child brides from minority communities are at higher risk of facing violence and abuse, which poses a serious threat to their right to education, health, work, and religious freedom...

"Although the majority of the girl victims of forced faith conversions and child marriage are minors, the fabricated age of all victims is deliberately altered to 18 years or above by perpetrators on certificates of marriage to avoid criminal conviction under the 1929 Child Marriage Restraint Act according to which marriage to underage children is illegal and punishable by imprisonment...

"All minor girls are presented as adults and economically independent, and their marriages are executed in the absence of a lawyer or consent of a legal guardian (parents)...

"All girl victims are made to change their identity by changing their names...

"Many cases involving abduction, followed by child/forced marriage and forced conversions of minority girls are not reported to the police due to the stigma attached to the abduction followed by rape...

"The minorities lack access to justice due to financial constraints as exercising the right to fair trial involves a lot of financial resources, time, and efforts.

The minorities face intimidation, harassment and threats from the Muslims that prevent them from following-up the cases in courts of law. Several girls reunited with families after they faced abduction, forced marriage and forced conversion; however, minorities are not likely to file petitions in court to bring perpetrators to justice due to the influence of the actors involved in conversion...

"Whilst all citizens in Pakistan face obstacles in access to justice, minority religious groups face even greater difficulties in the pursuit of justice. The police often turn a blind eye to reports of abduction and forced conversions, thereby creating impunity for perpetrators. The police forces, which are overwhelmingly Muslim, generally sympathize

with the goal of converting religious minorities to Islam. In limited instances of police intervention, local leaders exert considerable pressure to prevent any action.

Examples from the report of abductions, forced conversions and forced marriages include:

- "Huma Younas, a 14-year-old girl, was abducted on 10 October 2019 from Karachi by three Muslim men who took her to Dera Ghazi Khan district in Punjab province.... Despite the valid evidence of Huma's underage status, on 3rd February 2020, the court dismissed the petition in favor of the abductors, and allowed the perpetrators to maintain custody of Huma."
- "Persicla Dilawar, a 15-year-old Christian girl, was abducted from her home in Sumundhari, Faisalabad. Persicla's father Dilawar reported he and his wife were asleep when Muslim man Muhammad Qasim broke into their home and kidnapped their daughter. Qasim reportedly threatened them with death if they reported the incident. Consequently, Qasim forcibly married Persicla."
- "Shakaina Johnson, a 13-year-old Christian, disappeared in Lahore on February 19, 2021. She was working as a domestic helper alongside her mother Samina, and both Samina and Shakaina's father Johnson believed their daughter was kidnapped after leaving the home of a family she served as a domestic worker. Samina and Johnson filed an FIR two days later on 21 February 2021; the following month, they received news that Shakaina had allegedly converted to Islam and reportedly married an older Muslim man named Ali Bashir who provided authorities with counterfeit Islamic marriage certificates."
- "Shamim Bibi, a mother of five children, was abducted on July 5, 2021 by Muslim man Muhammad Akbar who converted her to Islam and forced her to marry him. Instead of registering the complaint of the victim's family, authorities filed the claim of the abductor that Shamim had willfully embraced Islam and contracted marriage with him. Contrarily, Shamim refused to accept this false claim."

Sadly, the government of Pakistan appears complicit in these and other crimes: it fails to provide women and children with required legal protection. A bill to criminalize forced religious conversions has been presented in the Sindh Assembly at least three times ([2016](#), [2019](#) and [2021](#)). Each time, it was rejected.

Around 1,000 girls from impoverished Hindu families in Pakistan's Sindh province are forcibly converted to Islam every year, the Associated Press [reported](#) in 2020.

"Pakistan," according to a US Congressional Research Service [report](#) issued in May of 2023, "is a country of more than 200 million people with nuclear weapons, numerous Islamist terrorist groups, and increasingly close ties to China."

According to the very same report, however:

"From 2001 until the second Obama Administration, Pakistan was among the leading recipients of U.S. foreign assistance, with Congress appropriating \$11 billion in economic, development, and humanitarian aid, and nearly \$8 billion in security-related aid for FY [Fiscal Year] 2002-FY2016. Pakistan also received about \$14.6 billion in Pentagon military reimbursements during this period. From FY2017 on, the Trump Administration requested and Congress appropriated significantly reduced aid amounts (reaching a two-decade nadir of \$87 million in FY2021) and, in 2018, the Administration initiated a broad, terrorism-related security aid suspension that has largely continued to date. The Biden Administration requested, and Congress has appropriated, modestly increased economic and development assistance amounts for FY2022 and FY2023—up 25% and 6% year-on-year, respectively."

Similarly, the European Union is Pakistan's second-most important [trading partner](#), accounting for 14.3% of Pakistan's total trade in 2020 and receiving 28% of Pakistan's total exports.

Meanwhile, Hindu and Christian children and women in Pakistan are unsafe. They are abducted for the purpose of sexual abuse and Islamist oppression. One reality demonstrated by the data regarding Western military aid to, or trade with Pakistan, is that neither military nor commercial cooperation with the government of Pakistan has had any positive influence regarding the human rights of religious minorities in the country.

Any military or economic cooperation with Pakistan should be conditioned on Pakistan's improvement of human rights and liberties for minorities, and a respect for international law. A government that is complicit in the abduction, forced religious conversion, sexual abuse and coerced "marriages" of minority children should not be considered qualified to benefit from any aid or cooperation from the West.

Forced marriages and forced conversions in Pakistan and the European Union

HRWF (31.05.2023) - On 8 May, HRWF organized a conference titled "EU-Pakistan: Human rights, religious freedom and the GSP+", at the Press Club in Brussels. MEP Peter van Dalen who has for years been a staunch defender of human rights in Pakistan could not be present but he sent us a video with a strong message on the issue.

NGO representatives in Belgium, Pakistan, Italy and the US participated in the event addressing a series of serious issues. Jonathan de Leyser, advocacy officer in Brussels at Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) spoke about forced marriages and forced conversions.

His contribution to the debate comprised three parts:

- An overview of the facts concerning what is happening in Pakistan in this area;
- Local and national responses;
- Some thoughts on EU recommendations, including some comments on the new GSP regulation (2024-2034), which remains under negotiation.

Overview of the facts

On 26 October 2022, six UN Special Rapporteurs, including the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, and the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls released a common statement from which Jonathan de Leyser excluded qualifying words such as "allegedly" and "reportedly" when he quoted a part of it "because these are all facts that CSW could confirm":

"The practice of abducting young women and girls who belong to religious minorities and forcing them to marry and convert to Islam against their will is (reportedly) widespread in Pakistan, particularly impacting the Hindu and Christian minorities. Victims are (allegedly) taken from their cities or provinces of origin, and deprived of contact with their families. They are then (allegedly) raped and/or forcibly married and forced to convert to Islam, sometimes under the threat of violence and with the direct involvement of religious clerics.

These women and girls are then (reportedly) forced by their abductors to appear before courts and give testimony and/or sign official documents which attest to their being of age and having married and converted to Islam of their own free will. This coercion (reportedly) takes place under the threat of violence against them or their families. Perpetrators of these offenses (are alleged to) enjoy a significant degree of impunity, enabled in part by the actions of the security forces and the justice system."

Statistics

According to data compiled by one of CSW's local partners in Pakistan, the Centre for Social Justice, 202 incidents were recorded and documented between 2021-2022. Almost all of them took place within the Sindh and Punjab provinces.

Disaggregated by religion, the 202 cases included 120 Hindu women and girls, 80 Christians and 2 Sikhs. The figures show that girls from "low" caste Hindu communities are the most at risk group. Noteworthy is the alarming rise over time, with an uptick of 59% in cases in 2022 from 2021. It is also relevant to disaggregate the cases by age. Of the 202 cases, only 20 were confirmed to be over 18 years old and 133 were at under 18 (including 55 who were under 14 years old). In the remaining 49 cases, the age was unknown or unconfirmed.

Except for the Sindh province, where the legal marriage age is 18, the other provinces maintain legal marriage from the age of 16 (under the Child Marriage Restraint Act 1929, stemming from the British Colonial era). This is out of step with international law and with most other countries in South Asia. There are also areas of judicial conflict with some Shari'a interpretations, which insist that marriage is legal for girls who have reached biological puberty.

Killed for refusing forced marriage

Beyond the data, it is also worth highlighting a concrete case that CSW reported on in 2022. A young Hindu woman named Pooja Kumari was 18-years-old, when on 21 March 2022, three men made an intrusion into her home, near the Chhuahra Mandi area of Sukkur in Sindh. One of the men is said to have asked Ms. Kumari to marry him but when she refused, he and the others attempted to abduct her. As she resisted, they shot her.

National response: no will to implement the legislation and to prosecute

Turning now to the national responses to this issue, a number of facts need to be mentioned. In 2017, an amendment was introduced to Pakistan's Penal Code, under Section 498B, which specifically criminalised forced marriage with a non-Muslim woman – punishable by a fine of 1m rupees, and 5-10 years in prison. But as far as it is known, no investigations have been carried out under this provision.

On paper this amended law should be sufficient to provide legal protection to girls and young women in many cases, but what can be seen is a lack of implementation and a lack of will (including political will) to enforce the Penal Code in such cases. A few examples:

1. First of all, public comments and speeches from leaders are problematic. As one example, a [seminar](#) organised earlier this year was hosted by Government Minister Mufti Abdul Shakoor, at which individuals who were suspected of having been forcibly converted were invited to explain how their conversions were in fact unforced. Those testimonies were presumably genuine but the event did not

platform any other cases. It did not represent a sincere attempt by the government to engage with the issue, but rather to minimise it publicly.

2. Secondly, there is a lack of political will in parliament. In 2019 the Federal Government set up a Parliamentary Committee to Protect Minorities from Forced Conversions. But in October 2021, the Ministry of Religious Affairs was opposed to a "Prohibition of Forced Conversions Bill" and it was rejected by parliament for [spurious reasons](#). Lawmakers from minority communities protested the decision.
3. The Government has also shelved reform to the Christian Marriage and Divorce Acts – where encouraging progress had been made under the previous government, spuriously claiming that it was because "the Christian community were not united". This was not true as the Christian community had reached a consensus on the reform.

Some thoughts for EU recommendations

Firstly, about sanctions. At the end of 2022, the UK government sanctioned [Abdul Hag](#) – a cleric responsible for forced conversions and marriages – under its Magnitsky equivalent Global Human Rights Regime. The EU should consider joining this movement.

Secondly, about private diplomacy. CSW has good contacts with the European External Action Service (EEAS) and with the new EU Special Envoy for FoRB. For anyone who has tried to engage with the Pakistan government on human rights issues, they will know that "what about India?" is often a retort. It is a fact that the situation for religious minorities in India is also extremely serious. The FoRB situation in India deserves attention in its own right – but as a by-product, doing so may also help advocacy in Pakistan.

Thirdly, the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP+) is repeatedly questioned by the European Parliament. In exchange of progress in the area of human rights, the EU scheme has been granting for years privileged access (reduced or zero duties) to the EU market to products from Pakistan. These products across approximately 66% of all EU tariff lines enter the EU market with 0% duties but in exchange there is no substantial progress in the implementation of human rights.

On the new incoming regulation for the period 2024-2034, CSW has been doing quite a lot of work.

"We are right now at a critical phase of the negotiations. The new regulation is in the trilogue phase – where the institutions get together to reach a compromise," Jonathan de Leyser said.

While there are hopes for some improvements on monitoring and transparency, it is unfortunately to be expected that the power of this scheme will be diluted. The Council and the Commission are attempting to add a new conditionality, in the area of migrant returns and readmissions. If this conditionality is added, the negotiating capital that has been available for human rights and other sustainable development purposes will get used up on the migrant issue.

GSP schemes are also regulated by WTO legislation. CSW has commissioned a legal opinion by Dr. Geraldo Vidigal of Uni of Amsterdam which clarifies that while GSP schemes can include conditionalities relevant to sustainable development (including human rights), domestic policy goals like migration are not foreseen therein.

And Jonathan de Leyser concluded by saying "I would encourage anyone working on this file, or anyone with good contacts with the trade ministries of member states to get in touch with us, as there is really a need to turn the Council on this issue.

Two Christian teenagers charged with blasphemy and sent to jail

[CLAAS-UK](#) (19.05.2023) - On May 19, the judicial magistrate cantt, Lahore, sent two Christian teenagers, Simon Nadeem, 12, and Adil Baber, 18, to jail on judicial remand, after they were charged under the blasphemy law section 295-C.

Both boys were charged and arrested by the police on May 18 after a complaint was made against them by police constable Zahid Sohail.

He said in his application to the police, that he was going to the mosque for prayers, when he saw the boys, Simon, son of Nadeem Nadu Masih, and Adil Baber, son of Baber Masih.

He alleged that they were both making fun of each other and were calling a puppy Muhammad Ali.

He also stated he has two eyewitnesses, Shabir Iqbal and another one, who can confirm his allegations. While both families said they have no puppy.

Samina Nadeem, the mother of Simon, told Pak Christian News (PCN): "On 18 May around 4:30 pm my son Simon and his friend Adil Baber were playing outside our house.

"Adil uses Naswar (a dipping smokeless tobacco product commonly used in Pakistan), while my son Simon was making fun of Adil for his this addiction to Naswar, he was asking Baber to spit out Naswar from his mouth.

"Muhammad Ali' is the brand name of the Naswar he takes. While both boys were talking about the brand, at the same time Zahid Sohail, a policeman, was passing by and heard them. Without knowing the facts, he started beating the children, saying they were committing blasphemy.

"Sohail didn't bother to find out the facts but started shouting and accusing the boys of committing blasphemy. He was purposely making a noise so in a few minutes several people gathered around and Sohail was telling everyone that these boys had committed blasphemy.

"People were continuing to gather to find out what was going on, but no one was trying to know the facts.

"Instead it seems they were believing what Sohail was telling them.

"This infuriated some of them and they ran to beat both boys, but somehow they managed to escape and save their lives."

Mrs Nadeem told us she has three sons and Simon is the youngest. While all this was going on in the street, Nadeem arrived home from work, he saw this situation and got scared when he was told that his son had committed blasphemy.

She added: "He and Baber both tried to calm down the mob but no one was willing to listen, and instead they wanted Simon and Adil handed to them so they could punish them."

Baber, father of Adil, who was sitting next to Mrs Nadeem said it was a very scary situation.

He said: "We were praying in our hearts and trying our best to calm down the mob as we knew what chaos could happen.

"I was reminded of all the past incidents like vigilante killings, ransacking churches and setting fire to Joseph colony.

"I continued praying that none of the past incidents would be repeated here, and God heard my prayers. A large number of police, including the deputy superintendent of police (DSP) and several senior inspectors, immediately started to calm down the mobs, assuring them that if someone had committed blasphemy he would be arrested and punished according to the law. The crowd somehow calmed down and demanded the arrest of both boys.

"Both boys were so scared and hiding inside their house. Simon is so young and therefore his father doesn't want him to be arrested.

"So instead of his son, Simon, Nadeem asked the police to arrest him. Until that time, I didn't know that my son's was also named in the First Information Report (FIR).

"I decided to hand over my son to the police, but I also sat in the police van and went to the police station with them to ensure the safety of my son and also to assure my son that doesn't worry I would do everything I could. It was scary when I was sitting in the police van as several people were running toward the van to grab me and my son from the police with the intention to kill us, but the police saved our lives.

"When we reached the police station, they put Adil and Nadeem in the cell and later on asked me to leave the police station and go home.

"They told me that for his safety, they would release Nadeem once Simon was arrested.

"It was the most difficult time of my life, I didn't want to come home without Adil, but I had no option.

"I came home with a heavy heart and took my wife and other children, locked our house and sought refuge with someone I know. since then we are hiding and are not aware of our future."

He further said that as the situation continued to worsen, it was decided to handover Simon to the police, otherwise his life could be in danger.

While Baber was talking to PCN, his phone rang and we could see the relief on his face. When he finished, he told us "Thank God, the police have released Nadeem", but that didn't mean he was a free man.

There were some rumours that after Friday prayers a mob could attack Christians' houses therefore several people had left their homes and moved to unknown places to save their lives.

He added: "I hope the police conduct their investigation impartially and court does the justice to them. They need to be released soon, otherwise, they have no future."

Nasir Saeed Director of CLAAS-UK said: "Unfortunately people continue to use the blasphemy law over petty issues. They hardly hesitate to take the law into their own hands.

"I don't think these two young boys had ever thought that any passer-by could hear their conversation and accuse them of committing blasphemy and endanger their lives. Sadly misuse of the blasphemy has become so common and people never think twice about how dangerous its consequences could be.

"Recently we heard that Musarrat Bibi, who was arrested for committing blasphemy earlier this month was released on 11th may, but just after a week two other Christian boys have arrested for a crime they never committed. This has changed their lives forever.

"Christians are living under constant threat of their lives while the international community, including US Commission on international Religious freedom (USCIRF), UN and EU has expressed their concerns with the Pakistani government over the continuous misuse of the blasphemy law."

Recently human rights watchdog, Human Rights Without Frontiers Int'l (HWRWF) had a conference in Brussels under the title "The GSP+ and blasphemy laws in Pakistan in the dock" and criticised the misuse of the blasphemy law in Pakistan. According to them Pakistan is a country of high concern for its systematic and serious religious freedom and other human rights' violations, and they have submitted several recommendations particularly in regard to stop the misuse of the blasphemy law.

Mr Saeed further said that both boys have been sent to jail, and nobody knows their fate.

He added: "I hope the police conduct their investigation impartially and court does the justice to them. They need to be released soon, otherwise they have no future."

Pakistan encroaches on international Ahmadi website content

Isabella Meibauer

[Religion Unplugged](#) (17.05.2023) - In February, the Pakistan Telecommunication Agency blocked online access to Wikipedia in all of Pakistan for "sacrilegious content." A few days later, officials reversed the decision, claiming that the benefits of Wikipedia outweighed the benefit caused by banning it entirely in order to restrict only a number of pages.

The PTA never stated which Wikipedia entries or pages contained the blasphemous content. However, in December 2020, the PTA had issued a notice to Wikipedia for “sacrilegious content,” particularly content that referred to Mirza Masroor Ahmad, the current leader of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community, as a Muslim.

Since 2008, the PTA has repeatedly banned or taken steps to ban online Ahmadi content inside Pakistan. However, the PTA has now extended its efforts to block or remove content that is hosted outside of Pakistan in the U.S., U.K., Australia, Singapore and Switzerland.

Amjad Mahmood Khan, spokesperson for the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, believes that PTA’s attempts to block content outside of Pakistan are alarming.

“(The PTA is attempting) to export its discriminatory blasphemy laws against foreign citizens, which include U.S. citizens, and citizens from many other countries,” he said. “If this is left unchecked, then it could create a situation where Pakistan ... will continue to seek to prosecute individuals like Ahmadi Muslims living abroad. The exportation of what is effectively a global blasphemy effort is disturbing.”

Ahmadi Muslims, or collectively the Ahmadiyya, comprise a sect of Islam founded by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad in 1889. Ahmad claimed to be the Messiah, or Mahdi, whom the Prophet Muhammad prophesied would revive, reform and peacefully restore Islam.

According to the Muslim doctrine of “khatuman-nabiyeen,” or Seal of the Prophets, the majority of Muslims believe that the Prophet Muhammad was the final prophet. Because Ahmadis believe that Mirza Ghulam Ahmad himself was a subordinate prophet to Prophet Muhammad, other Muslims view Ahmadi beliefs as blasphemous. For their part, Ahmadis contend they believe that Prophet Muhammad was the Seal of the Prophets.

As a result, Ahmadis are persecuted by other Muslims around the world, but particularly in Pakistan. The Pakistani Islamist group Khatme-Nubbawat’s main goal is to promulgate the absolute finality of the Prophet Muhammad, which directly conflicts with the Ahmadi belief that its founder was a subordinate prophet. According to Khan, Pakistan is the only nation to define who is a Muslim at the constitutional level. Even to apply for a passport as a Muslim requires one to affirm that Mirza Ghulam Ahmad is a false prophet.

On Dec. 24, 2020, the PTA issued a legal notice against U.S. citizens Amjad Khan and Harris Zafar regarding trueislam.com, the U.S. Ahmadiyya community’s website hosted in the U.S. The notice stated that because Ahmadis are not allowed to represent themselves as Muslims or to disseminate their beliefs under Pakistan’s constitution, the PTA could demand the removal or blocking of the website under Pakistan’s 2016 Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act.

The notice stated that failing to abide by the PTA’s directive could result in a fine of 500 million Pakistani rupees, or \$3.1 million USD, according to the exchange rate at that time.

Later correspondence from the PTA clarified that it was banning the website within the jurisdiction of Pakistan only. However, Section 1(4) of the Electronic Crimes Act, cited in the same correspondence, states that it regulates “any act committed

outside Pakistan by any person if the act constitutes an offence under the Act and affects a person, property, information system or data located in Pakistan.”

According to attorney Monsura Sirajee of O’Melveny & Myers LLP, representing trueislam.com, “our repeated requests to the PTA to confirm that it is not seeking a remedy beyond geofencing the website in Pakistan (not only including a complete takedown but also criminal liability and hefty civil sanctions) have gone unanswered.” She explained that the criminal charges could result in imprisonment up to 10 years.

Sirajee said that on Dec. 30, 2020, a chief justice of the Lahore High Court issued arrest warrants for anyone outside of Pakistan who publishes online content that is deemed blasphemous. She pointed out that Section 298-B of the Pakistan Penal Code criminalizes identifying oneself as an Ahmadi Muslim.

On Dec. 25, 2020, the PTA issued a press release, the same one regarding Wikipedia content, reporting it had directed Google to remove “misleading search results associated with the ‘Present Khalifa of Islam’” as well as remove a Quran app published on the Google Play Store by the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community within Pakistan.

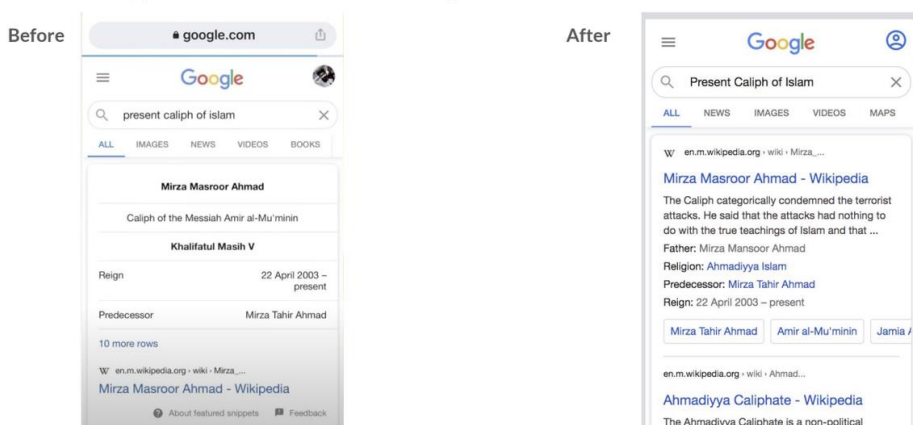
The community had first published a Quran app on the Play Store years prior. Google notified it of a request from the PTA to remove it in September 2018. While Khan says that Google had at first left the app available upon the community’s request, Google removed it without warning in October 2019 from Pakistan’s Play Store.

In May 2020, the community released a second Quran app, to which the December. 25, 2020, notice referred. Google complied again with the PTA’s request to remove the app on Dec. 27, 2020.

While the removal of both apps only affected Pakistan’s Play Store, Khan says that Google’s search results previously would generate a featured snippet that would list Mirza Masroor Ahmad as the current caliph of Islam when searching for the “the present caliph of Islam.” It appears that Google acquiesced to the PTA by removing the snippet also, and not just for Pakistan but on a greater transnational scale according to screenshots provided by Khan that were taken of the search results in

Impact

Featured Snippet has been removed from Google’s search results:



On Dec. 30, 2020, according to an [article](#) in *Dawn*, a Lahore High Court chief justice [inquired](#) about what action Pakistan's Federal Investigative Agency could take against someone outside Pakistan spreading blasphemous content, including registering a case against Google.

Additionally in December 2020, the PTA sent notices to the web distributor for Ahmadi websites [alhakam.org](#), [alfazl.com](#), [alfazlonline.org](#), [mta.tv](#) and [pressahmadiyya.com](#), all hosted in the U.K.

One of those notices, sent in an email dated Dec. 27, 2020, from a PTA employee, stated that because the content was hosted outside the country, "they are available throughout the country beside blocking restrictions imposed by PTA." It instructed the owners to "take immediate necessary measures so that these are not served in the country."

Ultimately, the PTA stated it had [removed](#) access to [trueislam.com](#) within Pakistan in a Jan. 22, 2021, press release.

Throughout 2021, the PTA continued to send notices to 24 additional Ahmadiyya websites, including [trueislam.co.uk](#), [ameauk.org](#), [ahmadiyya.uk](#), [lajna.org.uk](#), [khuddam.org.uk](#), [makhzan.org](#), [amjinternational.org](#), [alshirakat.org](#), [islamahmadiyya.net](#), [whyahmadi.org](#) and [lifeofmuhammad.org.uk](#) in the U.K.; [trueislam.com.au](#) in Australia; [khuddam.ca](#) and [jamiaahmadiyya.ca](#) in Canada; [trueislam.com.au](#) in Australia; [ahmadiyya.org.se](#) in Singapore; [aAhmadiyya.ch](#) in Switzerland and [ahmadiyyagallery.org](#) and [mkausa.org](#) in the U.S.

All of those websites were eventually blocked by the PTA within Pakistan.

As recently as June 2022, the PTA decided to block the website [ansarusa.com](#) in Pakistan.

According to Khan, unlike Google and Apple, which have acquiesced to the PTA's requests, Twitter and Wikimedia, the parent company of Wikipedia, have not removed Ahmadiyya content. He said that Twitter sent notices informing Ahmadiyya-related account owners that requests have been made to remove their content but has not taken the requested actions as far as he knows.

Likewise, Wikimedia has continued to host Ahmadi content.

But for [Harris Zafar](#), national spokesperson for Ahmadiyya Press USA, tech companies' compliance is only worsening the persecution against Ahmadis. "Big tech companies have actually fanned the flames of persecution by acquiescing to Pakistan's demands," he said.

Khan understands that tech companies do not want to lose access to countries with millions of users over so-called "domestic issues." However, he says that "if you truly are benefiting from free speech, and making so much money off of robust proliferation of speech, why would you selectively restrict it when it comes to the free speech of communities that are being targeted by the government? ... By doing so, tech companies are unfortunately complicit in their repression."

He points out that virulent videos calling for the killing of Ahmadis remain on YouTube while videos of peace-loving Ahmadis are removed because they are "offensive."

"The people who should be protected are the people who are being persecuted," Khan said.

But Khan says that Pakistan attempting to define who is or is not a Muslim is "the single greatest threat to a unified Muslim community. No Muslim has the right to define the inner convictions ... of someone's heart."

While any change to how other Muslims view Ahmadis will take a generational shift and acknowledgement of Ahmadis as Muslims from a constitutional approach, Khan says, "We will continue to courageously fight against religious repression wherever it is, to whoever it is, because our faith commands it. Islam stands for religious freedom for all."

Isabella Meibauer is a freelance writer with a focus on South and Southeast Asia. She earned a degree in religion from The King's College in New York City.

New false blasphemy charges in Pakistan

A Christian woman and a Muslim man have been falsely accused of burning Quran pages. They now risk the death penalty.

by Massimo Introvigne



The Government Girls High School in Tehsil Arifwala, Pakpattan. From Twitter.

[Bitter Winter](#) (16.05.2023) - In Pakistan, a complex of laws collectively known as the "blasphemy law" punishes blasphemy against Islam with the death penalty. To claim that these laws are needed, Muslim fundamentalists need to argue that blasphemy is widespread. Many incidents are, however, fabricated.

One **discussed on social media** happened on April 19 at the Government Girls High School in Tehsil Arifwala, in Pakpattan Sharif, the capital city of the Pakpattan district, located in the Punjab province of Pakistan. A mob gathered, ready to lynch a Christian woman

called Musarrat Bibi, and a Muslim man, Muhammad Sarmad. The duo was accused of having burned pages of the Holy Quran on April 15. The police intervened and dispersed the mob, but arrested the woman and the man, who were charged with blasphemy and now risk the death penalty.

Musarrat Bibi and Muhammad Sarmad are both illiterate, and work respectively as a cleaning lady and a gardener for the school. They were asked to clean a storage room and burn old and damaged papers. The school principal, Nasreen Saeed, told the police that there were no pages of the Quran in the storage room. However, some schoolgirls spread the rumor that pages of the holy book had been burned. The rumor spread and a mob gathered, claiming that the woman and the man should be killed on the spot.

Human rights activists believe that these were just fabricated charges, which spread through the fundamentalist rumor mills with the aim of supporting the idea that blasphemy laws should be maintained. Meanwhile, the lives of two illiterate workers, who just followed the instructions of their principal, are at risk.

Call for certain amendments to secure equal rights to non-Muslims

Seminar on '1973 Constitution & Religious Minorities' in Islamabad

Zubair Qureshi

Pakistan Observer (13.05.2023) - The Constitution of Pakistan gives equal rights to all citizens. However, with regards to the protection of the rights of minorities, there is a need for amendments in certain provisions of the Constitution. These views were expressed by senior politician of Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and a vocal champion of minorities' rights, former senator Farhatullah Babar, while addressing a seminar titled "1973 Constitution & Religious Minorities."

The seminar held at the National Press Club Islamabad was organized by the Minorities Alliance Pakistan (MAP). Chairman of the MAP, advocate Akmal Bhatti, Fayaz Bhatti, Anush Bhatti and Asif Jan and other speakers took the floor on this occasion.

Farhatullah Babar said that although Article 25 of the Constitution gives equal rights to all citizens, this Constitution does not allow a non-Muslim to become President or Prime Minister of Pakistan. He also expressed some concerns about discrimination and incidents such as forced conversions and attacks on minorities' places of worship, saying that unfortunately such incidents have increased. "It is the duty of the state to fulfill its responsibility about forced conversions and blasphemy laws," he said.

He also called for the implementation of the 2018 report of the Senate in this regard. "Establishment of Pakistan itself was a struggle of minorities because at that time Muslims were in the minority in the subcontinent," said Babar, adding that in the 1947 resolution on provincial autonomy, the rights of minorities were fundamental.

Advocate Akmal Bhatti said time had come to acknowledge the services and the sacrifices of the minorities and to shun the forces of extremism. "It can be made according to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations," he further said, adding the

minorities lived for Pakistan and were ready to die for it. In the seminar, suggestions for amendments to the constitution were also presented and a resolution was unanimously adopted.

A seven-point resolution presented by Nadeem Bhatti on behalf of Minorities Alliance Pakistan and unanimously adopted

1. The state must amend articles 41 & 91 to remove the ban on religious minorities to have access to the positions of President and Prime minister of Pakistan.
2. Religious minorities demand amendments in articles 51 & 106 of the Constitution of Pakistan, to :
 - grant them more seats in the National Assembly and Provincial Assemblies
 - change the proportional representation on the party list electoral system and to provide mixed member proportional representation (*dual vote system*)
 - Delimitation of constituencies regarding reserved seats for women and minorities.
3. Amendment in article 59 of the Constitution of Pakistan to allot a seat in the Senate to the minorities of the Federal Capital.
4. Amendment of all the laws and rules contrary to article 25 of the Constitution of Pakistan; equal status and citizenship to members of religious minorities in Pakistan.
5. Enactment of the law to:
 - stop forced conversions.
 - provide expeditious and inexpensive justice to the accused of blasphemy and amendment to put an end to the misuse of sensitive laws.
6. Implementation of a 5% job quota.
7. The historical speech of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah on 11 August 1947 must be made a substantive part of the 1973 Constitution of Pakistan.

Photo: Lawyer Akmal Bhatti, President of Minorities Alliance Pakistan (MAP), was one of the speakers of the conference held at the Press Club in Brussels on 8 May 2023 by Human Rights Without Frontiers (HRWF)

“Being a girl or a woman in Pakistan, especially in a minority”

Manel Msalmi, International affairs Advisor of MEPs of the European Peoples’ Party at the European Parliament

*HRWF (11.05.2023) - On 8 May, HRWF organized a conference titled “EU-Pakistan: Human rights, religious freedom and the GSP+”, at the Press Club in Brussels. **MEP Peter van Dalen** who has for years been a staunch defender of human rights in Pakistan could not be present but he sent us a **video** (Minute 14’32”) with a strong message on the issue.*

NGO representatives in Belgium, Pakistan, Italy and the US participated in the event addressing a series of serious issues. HRWF has the pleasure to present you parts of Manel Msalmi’s contribution to the debate:

In Pakistan, there is an increasing issue with girls and women of minority religions, such as Hindus and Christians.

Hindus make about 2% of Pakistan's estimated 220 million people, whereas Christians make up less than 1%.

Kidnappings, forced conversions and forced marriages of Hindu girls

Every year, there are reports of hundreds of forced conversion incidents. Most victims are from poor families and disadvantaged households.

In the southern province of Sindh, which is home to nearly 90% of the Hindu minority group, forced conversions to Islam of kidnapped Hindu girls and their subsequent forced weddings to Muslim men—usually to the abductors—are quite common.

Unfortunately, forcible conversions have not been made illegal in Pakistan by any of the successive administrations.

International reports recently said that at least 50 members of Hindu families in the Sindh province are known to have been forcibly converted.

A recent report that was presented to the United Nations Human Rights Council regarding the phenomenon of abduction, forced religious conversion, and forced marriage of young girls belonging to religious minorities, particularly Christians and Hindus, has been welcomed by Christian communities, Hindus, and civil society organizations in Pakistan.

A group of independent experts and special rapporteurs, including the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women and the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion and Belief, called for "immediate measures to address these cases and justice for the victims" in an appeal that was made in Geneva on 16 January last.

Unfortunately, for fear of powerful Islamist religious lobbies, neither the judiciary nor any other state institution is dealing with the phenomenon. For instance, despite the fact that the bill prohibiting the conversion of anyone under the age of 18 was passed by the Sindh Provincial Assembly in 2016, the local governor has yet to sign it, out of concern for widespread protests.

Advocacy in the media and art

Fortunately, these cases continue to be covered by Pakistani media, which is a very positive example of engagement. Media outlets recently reported the kidnapping and rape of a Hindu young woman in the Sindh province because she refused to convert to Islam.

The documentary film "The Losing Side," which was shown at the Cannes Film Festival in 2022 and won an award in the category of "Best Human Rights Film," also mentioned the phenomenon of abductions and forced conversions in Sindh. Media and art are engaged to counter extremism and violence against women.

A protest march was recently organized by several members of Pakistan's Hindu minority to raise awareness about the danger of Hindu girls and women being forced into marriage and conversion.

A member of the Pakistan Darawar Ittehad (PDI), a Hindu association, stated, "We wanted to highlight this big problem of the Sindhi Hindus, especially in the rural areas

where our young girls, some as young as 12 and 13, are abducted in broad daylight, forced to convert to Islam, and then married off to older Muslim men."

In Sindh, such cases have increased in recent months, filling the lower courts with applications from parents seeking the return of their daughters, sisters, and wives.

Sadly, no delegate from the government paid any attention to the requests of the peaceful protesters.

In 2019, the Sindh Assembly took up the issue of Hindu girls being kidnapped and forcefully converted in various districts of the province. A bill making this practice illegal was proposed but was rejected by the Assembly. In 2021, another bill suffered the same fate.

In January 2023, twelve human rights experts from the United Nations voiced their concern regarding the rising number of kidnappings, forced conversions and marriages of girls as young as 13 in Pakistan.

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan said in its last report that approximately 1,000 girls are forced to convert to Islam every year.

Being a woman in Pakistan

While women in Pakistan keep on enduring the worst part of constrained relationships, especially when they have been abducted, some have chosen to escape and to expose such injustices.

Pakistan is also confronting honor killings cases. Insights from the Common Freedoms Commission of Pakistan mention that there were 1,276 such homicides from 2014 to 2016. Even though the Pakistani Parliament passed a law that prohibits killings related to honor, they go on unabated, particularly in rural areas where many of them are not reported and remain unpunished.

Pakistani women are being culturally treated as second class citizens, especially when it comes to female education and job opportunities. The literacy rate for women is only 45%, which is very low when compared to the literacy rate for men, which is 69%.

Gender inequality is a global problem but in Pakistan it is at the root of many issues. It is regrettable that due to widespread illiteracy and a gender-based bias, Pakistani society is largely ignoring the gender imbalance and the vicious cycle of violence.

Conclusion

To conclude, the situation of women and girls in Pakistan whether they are Hindu, Christian or Muslim is critical. There is a need to empower young women and girls mainly with regard to education and economic opportunities as well as to stop violence against them, in particular in the framework of forced marriages and forced conversions in the case of young Hindu and Christian girls. The EU and the international community as well as women's rights and human rights organizations should act to protect minor girls.

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Cleric killed by mob following blasphemy accusation

[CSW](#) (09.05.2023) - A local cleric in the city of Mardan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, Pakistan, was killed by a mob on 6 May after he was accused of making a blasphemous reference during a political rally of former Prime Minister Imran Khan's party.

Maulana Nigar Alam, 40, reportedly stated 'Imran Khan is a truthful person and I respect him like the Prophet,' while addressing a rally arranged by Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) Mardan in the Sawaldher area, to express solidarity with Imran Khan and the judiciary on 6 May.

The remarks, which were considered blasphemy, prompted a group of those gathered at the rally to attack Mr Alam. Police were called to the venue and proceeded to lock him in a shop for his safety, however whilst talks were being held with the clerics, the mob, which primarily comprised of PTI activists, broke the shutters of the shop and took Mr Alam out by force. They began to kick him, beat him with sticks and ultimately lynched him to death. Video footage of the cleric's speech and of his killing went viral on social media.

This is the second incident of mob violence and killing in Pakistan in 2023. On 11 February a man suspected of committing blasphemy was [lynched](#) in Nankana Sahib, Punjab Province.

There have also been previous attacks of this nature in Mardan. On 13 April 2017, Mashal Khan, a student at the mass communications department of Abdul Wali Khan University, was [killed](#) over blasphemy allegations by a mob.

Pakistan's [blasphemy laws](#) criminalise anyone who insults Islam, including by outraging religious feeling, which carries the death penalty or life imprisonment. These laws are poorly defined and require low standards for evidence. As a result, they are often used as a weapon of revenge against both Muslims and non-Muslims to settle personal scores or to resolve disputes over money, property or business.

CSW's Founder President Mervyn Thomas said: 'CSW extends our deepest condolences to the family and loved ones of Maulana Nigar Alam. His tragic murder is yet another

disturbing reminder of the dangerous implications of Pakistan's notorious blasphemy laws. We reiterate that these laws are wholly incompatible with the fundamental right to freedom of religion or belief and must be reviewed urgently, moving towards their full repeal in the long term. We also call on the Pakistani authorities to ensure that a full investigation is carried out, and that all those responsible for this horrific act are held to account. It is necessary for the government to enforce the rule of law and not allow anyone to take the law into their own hands.'

For further information or to arrange interviews please contact Kiri Kankhwende, Press and Public Affairs Team Leader at CSW on +44 (0)782 332 9663 or email kiri@csw.org.uk.

CSW is a human rights organisation specialising in freedom of religion or belief. We work on over 20 countries across Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Latin America. www.csw.org.uk

"The GSP+ and blasphemy laws in Pakistan in the dock" Blasphemy legislation in Pakistan: Which response should be given by the EU?"

By José Luis Bazan, Legal Adviser for International Religious Freedom, Migration and Asylum, COMECE Secretariat, Brussels

HRWF (10.05.2023) - On 8 May, HRWF organized a conference titled "EU-Pakistan: Human rights, religious freedom and the GSP+", at the Press Club in Brussels. MEP Peter van Dalen who has for years been a staunch defender of human rights in Pakistan could not be present but he sent us a video with a strong message on the issue.

NGO representatives in Belgium, Pakistan, Italy and the US participated in the event addressing a series of serious issues. HRWF has the pleasure to present you parts of José Luis Bazan's contribution to the debate:

"What is the GSP+?"

The Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) is an EU scheme which grants **privileged access (reduced or zero duties) to the EU market** to products from certain less developed countries. When the eligible country gets **GSP+ status, its products across approximately 66% of all EU tariff lines enter the EU market with 0% duties.**

To become a beneficiary of the GSP+ status, the beneficiary country must demonstrate a tangible **progress on the implementation of [27 international treaties](#) regarding labour rights, good governance, climate and environment, and human rights** (including freedom of religion and other rights pertaining to religious minorities and their members).

Why Pakistan?

The **European Single Market, with over 440 million consumers, is Pakistan's most important destination. [Pakistan exports worth EUR 5.4 billion](#)**, namely garments, bedlinen, terry towels, hosiery, leather, sports and surgical goods. Pakistani exports to

the EU are dominated by [textiles and clothing, accounting for 75.2% of Pakistan's total exports to the EU](#) in 2020.

The **GSP+ has been very beneficial for Pakistani business**, increasing their exports to the EU market by 65% since the country joined GSP+ in 2014. As a result of the GSP+, [more than 76% of Pakistan's exports enter the EU duty and quota free](#). This represents almost 20% of Pakistan's exports globally.

Pakistan is a country of **high concern for its systematic and serious religious freedom and other human rights' violations**.

On 29 April 2021, the **European Parliament called on the Commission and the European External Action Service to immediately [review Pakistan's eligibility for GSP+ status in the light of recent human rights abuses](#)**, as "the government systematically enforced **blasphemy laws and failed to protect religious minorities** from abuses by non-state actors, with a sharp rise in **targeted killings, blasphemy cases, forced conversions, and hate speech** against religious minorities (...); whereas abduction, **forced conversion to Islam, rape and forced marriage** remained an imminent threat for religious minority women and children in 2020, particularly those from the Hindu and Christian faiths".

On 16 January 2023, six [UN Special Rapporteurs expressed alarm at the reported rise in abductions, forced marriages and conversions of underage girls and young women from religious minorities](#) in Pakistan and called for immediate efforts to curtail these practices and ensure justice for victims.

We must also pay attention to the **violation of the educational freedom of students and parents of religious minorities** in the education system:

- The new Single National Curriculum (SNC) violates the right not to receive religious instruction against the religious beliefs of parents and those of the child: it imposes Muslim instruction in non-religious mandatory subjects (History, Mathematics...).
- The evaluation system that empowers the knowledge of Islam giving extra points to them, discriminating non-Muslim students.
- Authorised schoolbooks promote Islam among non-Muslim students in public schools.

On Jan. 17, 2023, the Pakistan's National Assembly unanimously voted to **expand the country's [laws on blasphemy](#)** extending the punishment to those deemed to have insulted the Muhammad's wives, family and companions, [with 10 years in prison or life imprisonment](#). The Supreme Court of Pakistan has asked the Government, through its police, to deal more carefully with blasphemy cases and avoid the misuse of blasphemy laws,¹ in a process in August 2022.

The **extreme social and legal vulnerability of members of religious minorities** in Pakistan, most of them belonging to the poorest sections of society, make them easy targets of abuse, with **no real possibility of claiming their human rights** in a due process, often denied in law or in fact, in a context where the **police and judicial authorities** (particularly those of the lower courts) **show little or no interest in**

¹ http://www.fides.org/en/news/72797-ASIA_PAKISTAN_The_Supreme_Court_more_attention_to_blasphemy_cases_to_protect_the_innocent_and_guarantee_a_fair_trial

prosecuting the crimes of which they are victims and in protecting their fundamental rights.

Why now?

The European Commission [proposed on 22 September 2021 a new GSP Regulation](#), as the current one in force expires on **31 December 2023**. **New international conventions will be added** to the list of obligations that GSP countries should respect.

An EEAS/European Commission report which will be adopted by the College of Commissioners and addressed to the Council and Parliament should have been **published at the beginning of 2023**.

The proposed GSP regulation requires the **approval of the Parliament and the Council through the ordinary legislative procedure**. This increases the **political nature of the GSP+** which will be more than a mere trade agreement. Unlike the European Parliament, the EU Council wishes to maintain the Commission proposal to make GSP aid to beneficiary countries **conditional on the readmission of their nationals who are illegally present in the EU**. This issue was the subject of a debate characterised by particularly strong German opposition. A [comprehensive EU-Pakistan dialogue on migration](#) was launched in November 2022, with Commissioner Johansson visiting Pakistan.

Once adopted, the **new EU GSP Regulation will apply from 1 January 2024 for 10 years**.

The European Commission [extended Pakistan's GSP+ status](#) but it will have to **re-apply for get the GSP+ status before the end of 2015**. Meanwhile, the **current preferences continue to be applied**.

Conclusions and proposals

This situation calls for a **reassessment by the European Commission** in its future discussions with the Pakistani authorities on the preservation of the country's status as a beneficiary of GSP+ status, as it is clear that **Pakistan shows little respect for the above-mentioned international obligations**, in particular in relation to the country's religious minorities. In addition, some report about how the ruling elite in Pakistan had used this instrument for their personal gains.²

Clear and precise demand for due legislation and practice should be made to Pakistani authorities in relation to religious freedom and minorities, as a condition to the GSP+ renewal, including:

Specific measures, such as:

1. **Transfer of all blasphemy law cases to courts in the capital** to avoid social pressure against first instance magistrates on the ground.
2. **Immediate police protection of accused of blasphemy**, and possible transfer to a safe place along with his family.
3. **Criminal prosecution of false denouncers of blasphemy cases and severe punishment imposed upon them.**

² <https://www.lokmatimes.com/international/pakistan-defeated-gsp-purpose-benefits-under-serious-threat/>

4. **Disciplinary measures to members of the police and law enforcement bodies that don't protect the accused of blasphemy or mishandle the case.**

General measures, such as:

5. **Reform of the National Single Curriculum and school textbooks** with an appropriate portrayal of indigenous religious minorities, including their historical presence in the land, and their contribution to the country.
6. **Due investigation, prosecution and condemnation** of perpetrators of crimes against members of religious minorities.
7. **Special Prosecutor/Court to protect minors belonging to religious minorities, including e.g., young girls against forced marriage**, and an enforced ban of child marriage, making their consent non-valid in cases where the girl belongs to a religious minority."

See the full conference on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NoZthzG9bSQ&t=11s>

More reading

[Business Morning](#)
[EU Reporter](#)
[EU Political Report](#)

"Ahmadis are the worst kāfir": Terror in Pakistan via WhatsApp

Anti-Ahmadi attacks continue to be promoted in new and creative ways. The government ignores them and their dangers.

by Marco Respinti

قادیانیوں کا بائیکاٹ کیوں؟

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<https://chat.whatsapp.com/LMlpckmmum34g37R5AGu2w>

The anti-Ahmadi campaign via WhatsApp.

Bitter Winter (19.04.2023) - "Ahmadis pretend to be observant and devout Muslims, while they are not. They are not even sincere believers. They are indeed mere impostors, who fool and deceive good people of faith." **This is what a video, circulating on WhatsApp**, says about the members of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at (AMJ) ("jama'at" meaning "community") in Pakistan, one of the Muslim countries that discriminate and persecute them. The video is not (yet?) on the Internet, and is now being distributed via WhatsApp groups and broadcasts, as well as promoted as status, as screenshots testify.

The video is accompanied by an invitation in Urdu that has been translated into English for "Bitter Winter" by the **International Human Rights Committee** (IHRC), a non-profit and non-governmental organization focusing on freedom of religion or belief based in London. It reads: "Why boycott Ahmadis? Get WhatsApp status videos on the end of prophethood and rejection of Ahmadiyya. Send your name, city name, and WhatsApp number to the number provided below and receive them. To join the WhatsApp group for end of prophethood status videos, click on the link provided below."

For convenience, friends of IHRC uploaded a version of the video itself with English subtitles on Twitter. "Disbelievers all around the world, may they be Jews, Christians, Hindus, Sikhs; they don't conceal their disbelief," the pressing voice-over goes on.

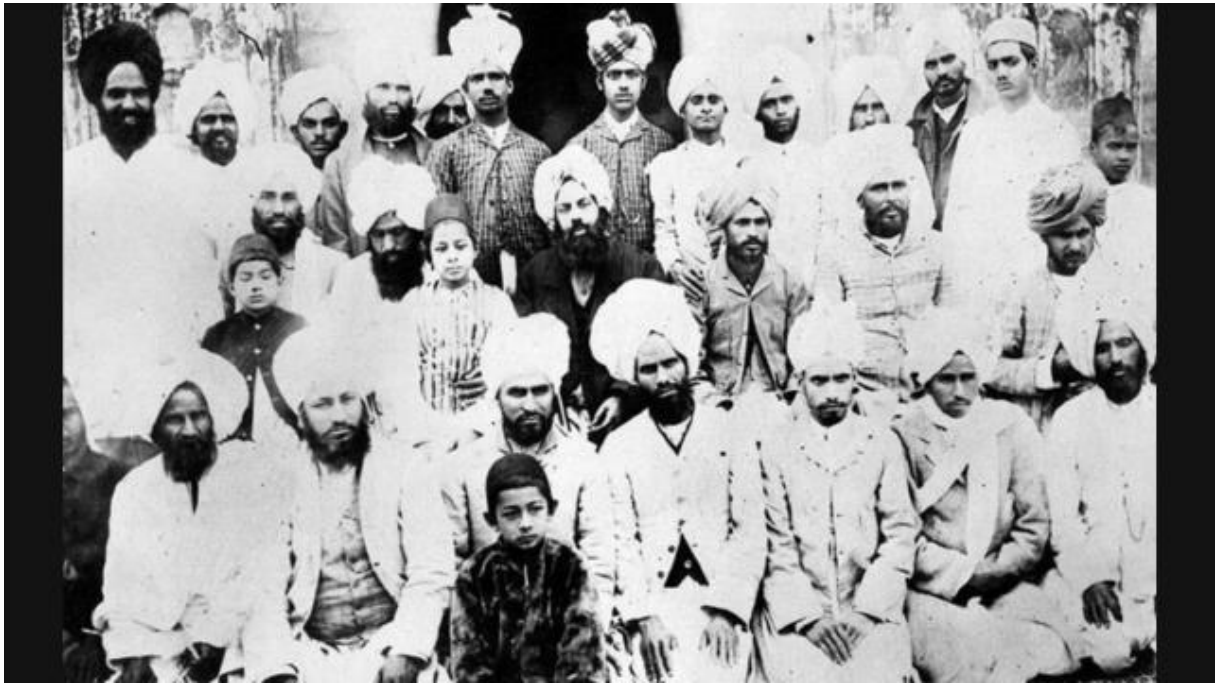
"Neither do they lead the Muslims astray by claiming to follow Islam. But the Qadiani is the only disbeliever in the world who, despite being a disbeliever, claims to be a Muslim and robs the innocent Muslims of their faith. Qadianis are Zindīq. A Zindīq is such a disbeliever who portrays his disbelief in the form of Islam. What a great thing (couplet) the revered Iqbal had said: It is a blemish on the name of knowledge and insight. They are preaching darkness in the name of light."

"Zindīq" is an Arabic word for the heretic who hold views or follow practices that are contrary to central Islamic dogmas, and "Iqbal" refers to Sir Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938), the writer and poet in Urdu language, who was born in what today is Pakistani Punjab. The "end of prophethood" is the Islamic doctrine that there can be no prophet after Muhammad (571–632), a doctrine Ahmadis are accused of violating by proclaiming that their founder was also a prophet (although he was at the same time "a follower of the Holy Prophet," i.e., of Muhammad).

"This is a revealing example of the campaign of smear and offense that is going on in Pakistan against the Ahmadis," says to "Bitter Winter" Nasim Malik, Secretary General of IHRC. "For Ahmadis, the cultural and political climate in Pakistan is quite hot. Ahmadis cannot count on any social media platform in the country to speak out their mind, clarify their position, and inform the public. They don't have any. So, the power of their adversaries multiplies. As to traditional media, they don't dare to touch the subject. They are afraid of speaking truthfully of Ahmadis. And politicians are intimidated too."

The video depicts in fact Ahmadis as the worst of all forgers and counterfeiters. They are labelled "kāfir," the Arabic word for "infidels" and "disbelievers," and derided as "Qadianis," and here lies the main danger. These two offenses combined can in fact pave the way to serious crimes.

The latter is a derogatory term derived from the fact that Qadian is the holy city of Ahmadis in the Indian Punjab (the Punjab province having been divided between India and Pakistan since the Partition of India in 1947), the birth and burial place of the founder of the movement, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1835–1908). The first is an insult theologically targeted. Together they convey the idea that Ahmadis are a group of usurpers of the Muslim name that impugn and abuse what for Muslims is the truth of Islam.



Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (seated in the center) and disciples in Qadian, circa 1901. Credits.

Now, lying on what is perceived to be the ultimate truth on everything and in its name is equal to a manifest blasphemy. For a religious culture such as Islam, which believes (as other religions also do) in the existence of the devil as the ultimate trickster who twists and perverts truth, that particular kind of lying can be constructed as being the supreme expedient of the devil, acting through emissaries.

In a country like Pakistan, where a complex of norms, generally known as “blasphemy laws,” is used by Muslim ultra-fundamentalists and by the authorities themselves to persecute, up to imposing death sentences, religious minorities and political dissidents, being perceived as heterodox emissaries of the devil may entail a dire fate.

Vandals attack Ahmadi mosques in Pakistan, encouraged by the police

New attacks against the Ahmadiyya community in Karachi raise concerns about the complicity between public security forces and private bands of thugs.

by Marco Respinti



The attack of January 18, 2023. Source: International Human Rights Committee.

[Bitter Winter](#) (06.02.2023) - On January, 18, 2023, three thugs entered the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mosque on Martin Road in Karachi, Pakistan, and desecrated two of its minarets. "The upper portion of the minaret," the [International Human Rights Committee reports](#), "has been smashed to bits. The attackers left behind the ladder and a sledgehammer. They fled as soon as the police arrived. This is the third desecration of an Ahmadi Muslim Mosque this month."

The IHRC is a non-profit and non-governmental organization focusing on freedom of religion or belief based in London, and offers first-hand news on the discrimination and persecution of the Ahmadis. As it points out, "[l]ast month police destroyed minarets at the Ahmadiyya Mosque in Baghbanpura, Gujranwala and few days ago, a 108-year-old Ahmadiyya Mosque in Moti Bazaar Wazirabad was desecrated by the police."

In Pakistan, the persecution of the Ahmadiyya community boasts the sad record of being the only state-sponsored politics of bigotry in a Muslim country against a Muslim community. For the Muslim Pakistani government, the Ahmadis are in fact non-Muslim heretics. That scholars may disagree is regarded as irrelevant, and the persecution of this group reaches levels of true sadism.



The Ahmadi mosque in Adda, Tehsil Gojra, District Toba Tek Singh. Source: International Human Rights Committee.

[As IHRC reports](#), quoting information from the [Deputy Superintendent](#) of the local police received by the organization, police officers in Adda, Tehsil Gojra, District Toba Tek

Singh, forced Ahmadis “to demolish Minarets from their own Ahmadiyya Mosque by themselves.”

What is most staggering is that this is contrary to Pakistan law, as the **Supreme Court of Pakistan stated in its recommendations (PLD 2014 SC 699)**.

Yet, again, on February 2, 2023, vandals attacked the Ahmadiyya Hall, built in 1950 in Saddar Karachi (the commercial district of the Pakistani city), and razed its minarets to the ground.



Vandals attacking the Ahmadiyya Hall in Saddar Karachi on February 2. From Twitter.

Around 5-10 persons climbed up the wall, IRHC denounces, and hit the structure with a hammer. A **video widely circulated on social media** documents the incident.

On February 3, two more serious incidents took place late at night in the province of Sindh. Two Ahmadi mosques were attacked. In Noor Nagar, a village in the Umerkot District, unknown assailants climbed the boundary walls of the local Ahmadi mosque, poured gasoline, and set it on fire. Similarly in Goth Chaudary Javed Ahmed at Goth Ghazi Khan Mirani, in Mirpur Khas District, the minarets of the Ahmadi mosque were ravaged by a group of unidentified aggressors before the whole building was set on fire.

Yet another attack happened on February 4. Around 8:30pm, another group of fanatics opened fire near the Prayer Centre of the Satellite Town neighborhood of Mirpur Khas City, the capital of the homonymous district. Ahmadis believers were inside the Centre. Bullets were found in the gate and the boundary walls.

The situation is rapidly escalating, and the call to authorities to stop both private thugs and abuse by their own police officers is becoming more urgent every single day.

Pakistan tightens blasphemy laws, concerns escalate among human rights groups

Pakistan has further tightened its strict blasphemy laws by extending the punishment for those found insulting religious figures connected to the Prophet.

[Amrit Burman](#)

[Republic World](#) (24.01.2023) - The Pakistan National Assembly has further tightened its strict blasphemy laws by extending the punishment for those found instigating religious sentiment and figures connected to Prophet Muhammad. A unanimous bill passed by the Pakistani assembly that will now increase more severe punishments and fines for those convicted under it has now escalated concern among human rights activists and observers reported *Independent*.

Notably, human rights activists are now concerned that the new amendment could be "weaponised disproportionately" against minorities, as it will widen the prospect of persecution for some, especially religious minorities, including Hindus and Christians.

Concern over tightening of blasphemy laws

According to the new changes introduced in the law, anyone convicted of abusing or insulting the Prophet's wives, companions, or relatives will face 10 years in prison or life imprisonment, along with a fine of Rs 1 million Pakistani rupees (\$4,500 or £3,489). Further, the law makes blasphemy offence a non-bailable crime.

"The punishment for insulting a member of parliament is five years, while the punishment for insulting sacred personalities is three years," said Abdul Akbar Chitrali, the lawmaker who drafted the bill. While passing the bill, Chitrali told the house, "May this bill be a cause of our salvation, and may Allah grant our rulers the ability to implement the bill in letter and spirit." He added, "This is an insult in itself."

The legislation was hailed by Zahid Akram Durrani, the deputy speaker, who called it "historic" and congratulated the lawmakers. Meanwhile, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) expressed concern over the law, saying it is "likely to exacerbate the persecution of Pakistan's beleaguered religious minorities and minority sects."

"Given Pakistan's troubled record of the misuse of such laws, these amendments are likely to be weaponized disproportionately against religious minorities and sects, resulting in false FIRs [the first step towards a police complaint], harassment, and persecution," the statement added.

However, Pakistan has always been cruel towards those found saying anything against Prophet Muhammad as earlier, a Pakistani Christian woman was sent to death row after being accused of blasphemy, but was acquitted. Also, the law has triggered the fear that mob lynchings of those accused of blasphemy could now become a common occurrence across the country.

UN: Pakistan should halt forced conversions, marriages of Christian and Hindu Girls

Six Special Rapporteurs wrote to the government of Pakistan. They have now decided to publish their letter.

by Massimo Introvigne



The mother of Chanda Maharaj protesting for her daughter. From Twitter.

[Bitter Winter](#) (16.01.2023) - Readers of Bitter Winter are familiar with the systematic kidnapping, rape, forced conversion to Islam and “marriage” to her captors of girls from religious minorities in Pakistan. We “adopted” one of them, **Chanda Maharaj**, whom the court still keeps in a shelter against her will to return to her family. We made her case internationally known, which may have contributed to the fact that at least she was not returned to her abductor and rapist. Now, the United Nations are taking notice.

A 16-page letter sent on October 26, 2022 by a group of United Nations Special

Rapporteurs to the government of Pakistan on the issue of forced conversions to Islam has now been made public, minus the names of the witnesses the Rapporteurs relied on. It is signed by the Special Rapporteur on minority issues; the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief; the Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children, including child prostitution, child pornography and other child sexual abuse material; the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and consequences; the Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially women and children; the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences. The Working Group on discrimination against women and girls also signed to express its support.

The Rapporteurs mention the cases of several Hindu and Christian girls, including Mehwish Patras, Chashman Kanwal, Zarvia Pervaiz, and Saba Nadeem (other names are obliterated in the published version of the letter for security reasons). Aged between 13

and 20, they were kidnapped, raped, forcibly converted to Islam, and married to their captors.

In all but one of the cases mentioned by the Rapporteurs the girls were minors, meaning that under the current Pakistani law they could not have married. Yet, they were forced by Muslim clerics and their captors to appear in court and lie about their ages, stating that they had converted and married of their own free will.

The Rapporteurs openly accuse the Pakistani police of collusion with the kidnappers. Police officers, they say, have illiterate parents signing documents they do not understand, or blanks forms subsequently filled in by the police, where they attest that their daughters are older than 18, while the opposite is true.



Chanda Maharaj's mother at a rally protesting forced conversion. From Twitter.

Sexual relationships with underage girls, even if “voluntary” or after a “religious marriage,” should in theory be regarded as statutory rape in Pakistan. However, both the police and courts do not prosecute the kidnappers and “husbands,” and are happy to accept videos made or statements signed under duress where the girls claim that they are of age and consented to the “marriages.” Courts also accept documents that are obviously false, or ask friendly doctors to determine the “biological age” of girls that are then declared fit to marry.

The Rapporteurs also criticize the Parliament and politicians who failed to pass legislation effectively protecting religious minority women and girls from forced conversion and forced marriage.

Clearly, the letter identifies a systemic problem, which is not limited to the cases whose details it mentions. “While awaiting a reply, we urge that all necessary interim measures be taken to halt the alleged violations,” the Rapporteurs write. It seems that Pakistan is not willing to take any such measure.