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## **Ahmadi issues : Lawyer threatened with disbarment, four jailed with false blasphemy charges**

***An attorney has been told he would not be allowed to enter courts if he does not renounce his faith Four are accused as usual of having burned pages of the Quran.***

*by Massimo Introvigne*

[Bitter Winter](#) (06.09.2024) - The persecution of the Ahmadiyya Community in Pakistan continues. The Ahmadis recognize their 19<sup>th</sup>-century founder Mirza Ghulam Ahmad as "both a prophet and a follower of the Holy Prophet [Muhammad]." This is not good

enough for conservative Sunni Muslims, for whom nobody can be called a prophet after Muhammad. Accused of denying this doctrine of the “finality of prophethood,” Ahmadis are prohibited by Pakistani laws to call themselves Muslims and are continuously discriminated and persecuted.

On September 1, it was revealed on social media that the President of the Gojra Bar Association, Ejaz Akhtar Kahoja, had written a letter to an Ahmadi lawyer called Tahir Nauman. The letter stated that the lawyer should renounce his faith or they would cancel the allotment of his chamber and he would be stopped from entering the courts at Gojra, the administrative capital of Gojra tehsil in Punjab.

Meanwhile, four Ahmadis remain in jail in the Narowal district, in the upper part of Punjab, for what has become the standard false accusation of blasphemy. They were allegedly seen burning pages of old books, which accusers claim were copies of the Holy Quran.

The dynamic is always the same. A cleric from a radical organization, in this case the same Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat involved in the recent prosecution for blasphemy of [anti-rape blogger Asma Batool](#), denounces the alleged blasphemy.

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## **Death penalty of Christian Ehsan Shan: Will the EU Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion defend his cause in Islamabad?**

***The EU Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Mr Frans van Daele, a former Belgian diplomat, is currently on mission in Pakistan.***

HRWF (09.09.2024) - Christian organizations and human rights activists in Pakistan and in Brussels hope that the EU diplomat will raise the issue of the young Christian **Ehsan Shan** sentenced to death on 1 July last by the Anti-Terrorism Court in Sahiwal for alleged blasphemy.

He had been charged for reposting on his TikTok account an image of a damaged text of the Qu’ran, an incident which led to a huge anti-Christian pogrom in Jaranwala on 16 August 2023. According to the police, the young man was involved in the **alleged** desecration but by sharing it, it was made viral on the Internet.

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.

Ehsan Shan was additionally sentenced under numerous other articles of the Pakistan Penal Code, to 22 years’ “rigorous imprisonment” and fined 1 million Pakistan Rupees (3350 EUR). It is not unusual that people sentenced to death on blasphemy charges also get a prison sentence.

According to representatives of the local Christian community, the young man is "just a scapegoat" while those who attacked and burned churches and Christian homes go unpunished.

### **About anti-Christian pogroms, blasphemy issues and 'justice'**

On 16 August 2023, a violent mob destroyed and set fire to over 90 Christian homes and about 26 churches in the Christian quarter of Jaranwala (Punjab).

Last February, Pakistan's Supreme Court had rejected the prosecution's report on the Jaranwala mass violence, calling it "extremely flawed" as it lacked relevant information and details about the arrests.

The lack of appropriate judicial action in such cases is regularly called into question and criticized both in Pakistan and by international organizations, including the European Parliament.

A recent case is a lynching in [Sargodha](#) (May 2024), the accused of violence were released on bail. In recent days (June 2024), a violent mob killed a Muslim man, [a tourist accused of insulting the Koran](#) in the mountain town of Madyan in the Swat district of the Pakistani province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. "Such incidents," said Catholic lawyer Khalil Tahir Sandhu, Senator and Minister for Human Rights in Punjab province, "underline the growing trend of mob violence in Pakistan, which is increasing the sense of insecurity in society."

The case has reignited the debate on the blasphemy law and its impact, and has drawn renewed attention to the urgent need for legal reform. The law is often misused when it comes to personal disputes.

There are numerous cases of Christians, Hindus, Muslims and Ahmadis being wrongly accused and imprisoned, while simple accusations can lead to mass violence and arbitrary executions. According to the Database of religious prisoners of conscience of the [US Commission on International Religious Freedom](#), over 50 members of religious minorities are currently languishing in prison, some of them being on death row on blasphemy charges.

Pakistani Christians and other minorities in Pakistan as well as the international human rights community hope that the EU Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief will use his mission to raise the issues of blasphemy, mob violence and the lack of appropriate judicial action and will report to the European Parliament.

### **More reading**

2024-08-26

[A year from the violence against Christians in Jaranwala, the urgency for justice](#)

2024-07-19

[Legal age for Christian marriage at 18: a step forward to protect girls and abandon child marriage](#)

2024-07-02

[In connection with the violence in Jaranwala: young Christian sentenced to death](#)

2024-06-25

[Parliament condemns lynchings and calls for respect for the rule of law](#)

2024-06-21

[Man lynched after accusation of blasphemy: an "influencer" campaign aims to promote rule of law and peace](#)

2024-06-03

[After mass violence in Sargodha: Christian dies of serious injuries](#)

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## The EU Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief on mission in Pakistan

*Press release of Human Rights Without Frontiers (7 September 2024)*

HRWF (07.09.2024) - **The EU Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Mr Frans van Daele, is on the eve of carrying out a fact-finding mission in Pakistan. The dates announced two months ago were 8-11 September and it was quite recently confirmed that he would be in Islamabad next week. At this stage, it is not known who will be his interlocutors as there was no official announcement about his mission, his program and his objectives.**

However, it can be expected that he will raise a number of issues concerning the egregious human rights violations particularly affecting local religious minorities and it is to be hoped that he will collect useful and concrete information for the European Commission in relation with the commercial privileges of the GSP+ status granted by the EU to Pakistan. Last but not least, **we would recommend him that he visit a person imprisoned on blasphemy allegations. This would be an encouragement to all the religious prisoners of conscience – over 50 of them, according to the Database of documented cases of the [US Commission on International Religious Freedom](#) - and to Pakistani civil society.**

*Human Rights Without Frontiers* has contacted representatives of the Roman Catholic Church, Catholic associations, Ahmadi groups, lawyers and human rights activists in Pakistan but they were unaware of that visit or said they had not received any invitation for a meeting. A number of talks will certainly take place in the premises of the [EU Delegation to Pakistan](#).

### **The commercial privileges linked to the GSP+ status**

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

The GSP+ - Generalised System of Preferences - 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 BUT to become and to remain a beneficiary of the GSP+ status, the beneficiary country must demonstrate a tangible progress on the implementation of [27 international treaties](#) regarding labor rights, good governance, climate and environment, and human

rights (including freedom of religion and other rights pertaining to religious minorities and their members).

### **The GSP+ status, religious freedom and human rights**

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.

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 (\*), in a process in August 2022.

### **About the desperate situation of the Ahmaddiyya community in Pakistan**

The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in Pakistan is enduring an alarming rise in violence and systemic persecution in 2024, with a disturbing trend of targeted murders, desecration of mosques and graves, and the continued denial of basic civil rights.

In January 2024, Punjab police desecrated 65 Ahmadi tombstones in Musay Wala, claiming to act on orders from a local official known for persecuting Ahmadis. These acts of desecration not only violate the sanctity of the community's religious sites but also send a chilling message that their existence is unwelcome in Pakistan.

This year, up to July 2024 alone, four Ahmadi Muslims have been brutally murdered in religiously motivated attacks. These include the killing of Tahir Iqbal, the president of the local Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in Bahawalpur, who was gunned down by motorcyclists in March. In June, a 16-year-old madrassa student murdered two Ahmadi men, Ghulam Sarwar and Rahat Ahmad Bajwa, in separate incidents in Mandi Bahauddin, citing religious motives. The violence continued in July when Zaka ur Rehman, a 53-year-old dentist, was shot dead in his clinic in Lala Musa, Gujrat. These heinous acts reflect the extreme vulnerability of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, who are routinely targeted for their faith, with little accountability for the perpetrators.

The violence against the community extends beyond physical attacks to the systematic desecration of Ahmadi Muslim mosques and graves. In February 2024, extremists armed with guns, hammers, and shovels attacked an Ahmadi mosque in Kotli, Azad Jammu and Kashmir, destroying its minarets and brutally beating worshippers. In June, during Eid celebrations, a mob of 150 people attacked another Ahmadi mosque in Kotli and across Pakistan more than 30 Ahmadis were arrested - including a 13 year old boy - for celebrating the Islamic festival of Eid.

## About the desperate situation of Christians, Hindus and Sikhs in Pakistan

Christians have been repeatedly victims of mob violence following blasphemy allegations.

On 16 August 2023, a violent mob of hundreds of people 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 and 91 houses were ransacked by mobs.

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.

On early July 2024, it was reported that Ehsan Shan, a Christian in his early 20s, had been put on death row for reposting on his TikTok account an image of the text of the Qu'ran damaged in Jaranwala on 16 August 2023. Ehsan Shan, though not a party to the desecration, was sentenced under numerous articles of the Pakistan Penal Code, to 22 years' "rigorous imprisonment" and fined 1 million Pakistan Rupees (UK£2,830).

Over the decades, hundreds of people have been falsely accused and many killed in targeted sectarian attacks.

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.

Christians, Sikhs, and Ahmadis have also been killed in sectarian hate crimes outside any accusation of blasphemy and justice is rarely delivered.

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](#).

According to data compiled by the Centre for Social Justice in Pakistan, 202 cases of abduction, forced marriage and forced conversion were recorded and documented in 2021-2022: 120 Hindu women and girls, 80 Christians and 2 Sikhs. Almost all of them took place within the Sindh and Punjab provinces.

Beyond the data, it is also worth highlighting the concrete case of an 18-year old Hindu woman named Pooja Kumari who resisted an abduction attempt and was shot by her aggressors on 21 March 202 in a city in the Sindh province.

In May 2022, two Sikh traders, Ranjit Singh (42) and Kuljeet Singh (38), were peacefully sitting in front of their shops in Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, on May 15, when two men arrived on a motorbike, opened fire, and killed them.

(\*) [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](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)

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## **Political Injustice - the ongoing persecution of Ahmadi Muslims**

By Fareed Ahmad for Human Rights Without Frontiers

HRWF (30.08.2024) - The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in Pakistan is enduring an alarming rise in violence and systemic persecution in 2024, with a disturbing trend of targeted murders, desecration of mosques and graves, and the continued denial of basic civil rights.

This year, up to July 2024 alone, four Ahmadi Muslims have been brutally murdered in religiously motivated attacks. These include the killing of Tahir Iqbal, the president of the local Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in Bahawalpur, who was gunned down by motorcyclists in March. In June, a 16-year-old madrassa student murdered two Ahmadi men, Ghulam Sarwar and Rahat Ahmad Bajwa, in separate incidents in Mandi Bahauddin, citing religious motives. The violence continued in July when Zaka ur Rehman, a 53-year-old dentist, was shot dead in his clinic in Lala Musa, Gujrat. These heinous acts reflect the extreme vulnerability of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, who are routinely targeted for their faith, with little accountability for the perpetrators.

The violence against the community extends beyond physical attacks to the systematic desecration of Ahmadi Muslim mosques and graves. In February 2024, extremists armed with guns, hammers, and shovels attacked an Ahmadi mosque in Kotli, Azad Jammu and Kashmir, destroying its minarets and brutally beating worshippers. In June, during Eid celebrations, a mob of 150 people attacked another Ahmadi mosque in Kotli and across Pakistan more than 30 Ahmadis were arrested – including a 13 year old boy - for celebrating the Islamic festival of Eid.

The violence against Ahmadi Muslim mosques is compounded by state-sanctioned desecration of their graves. In January 2024, Punjab police desecrated 65 Ahmadi tombstones in Musay Wala, claiming to act on orders from a local official known for persecuting Ahmadis. These acts of desecration not only violate the sanctity of the community's religious sites but also send a chilling message that their existence is unwelcome in Pakistan.

Adding to this climate of fear and suffocation of faith, is the ongoing legal discrimination against Ahmadi Muslims, particularly in the realm of voting rights. Since 1985, Pakistan has denied Ahmadis the right to vote as they are placed on a separate non-Muslim electoral register meaning that the only way they can vote is by renouncing their Islamic faith. As a result, the community has been systematically disenfranchised for nearly four decades including in the elections earlier this year.

The persecution of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community reached a new level of intensity in August 2024 following the ruling in the Mubarak Ahmad Sani case. In February 2024, Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa's bench ordered the release of Mubarak Sani, an Ahmadi Muslim accused of acting in contravention of the Punjab Holy Quran (Printing and Recording) (Amendment) Act, 2021.

Mr Sani had been charged, in 2022, for giving a copy of the book Tafseer-e-Sagheer (Holy Quran with commentary) to Ahmadi students in 2019. However, the court found that as the alleged offense of distributing such material occurred in 2019, no action could be taken as it was not unlawful until the 2021 amendment, and the law could not be applied retrospectively.



It also rejected the call for further charges under the blasphemy laws to be added as there was no evidence of such offences in the FIR or police reports, and it thus ordered his release. This ruling sparked a massive backlash from extremist groups, particularly Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), which launched widespread protests and a hate campaign against Ahmadis and Chief Justice Isa.

The situation escalated further in July when the Supreme Court issued a verdict after its review of the decision in which it upheld its decision to release Mr Sani and noted that while the status of Ahmadis under the constitution remain unchanged, Ahmadis had the right to profess and practice their faith in private. This sparked further protests and hostility against the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, and the issuance of a bounty on Chief Justice Isa's head by TLP leaders.

The Supreme Court was then pressured by extremists and the Punjab Government to conduct a clarification hearing where it was pressed again to overturn the decision despite such action being beyond the remit of such a hearing. Shockingly the earlier verdict was amended - despite it being a final verdict of the country's highest court - and a notice was issued that sections that referenced that Ahmadis had the right to practice their faith in private are to be removed.

This sets a very dangerous precedent for the country. The case underscores the dangerous intersection of the judiciary and politics in Pakistan, where judicial decisions that challenge extremist views can provoke violent reprisals, and it leaves open the door for any future verdict to be overruled by violent threats by extremists.

This is an extremely serious development that clearly threatens Ahmadis, but it also threatens all minorities and indeed every citizen as it completely undermines the independence of the judiciary. This is a far cry from the noble vision of the founder of Pakistan, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, and from the respect, dignity and justice that all Pakistanis deserve, and indeed are entitled to, as equal citizens of the country.

**(\*) Fareed Ahmad, National Secretary External Affairs of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community UK**

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## **Muslim Ahmadi dentist brutally murdered in cold blood**

***Ahmadis in Pakistan endure a life of severe oppression, live in fear of death, and struggle to have the basic right to live and move freely***

[Atalayar](#) (08.08.2024) - The Ahmadiyya Community has denounced in an official statement the shooting death of an Ahmadi doctor in Pakistan as part of **the spiral of persecution** suffered by this group in the Pakistani nation.

### ***Official statement of the Ahmadiyya Community***

On 27 July 2024, Dr Zaka Ur Rehman, 53, was shot dead in the morning outside his dental clinic on GT Road as he was opening his clinic. This comes just two days after a



group of UN human rights experts, including UN Special Rapporteurs, called for an "immediate end to discrimination and violence against Ahmadis in Pakistan", showing documented evidence of "extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests and detentions, attacks on places of worship and restrictions on freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association".

**The state of Pakistan seems to have surrendered to the aggressors in the name of its own protection, lest these violent fanatics accuse them of being Ahmadis as well.**

**Ahmadis in Pakistan endure a life of severe oppression, live in fear of death, and struggle to have the basic right to live and move freely.** Discrimination against people based on their beliefs is unacceptable. The Ahmadis do not even have the security of returning home safely to their loved ones.

**The fact is that there is an alarming increase in hate campaigns against the Ahmadi community in Pakistan.** The killing of Ahmadis has become the norm in Pakistan, something the government hardly takes notice of. Threats and attempts to kill Ahmadis have increased almost everywhere in the country.

The impact of a bullet in the wall, where many Ahmadis were shot dead in a mosque.

**We ask for your support, so that the government of Pakistan takes strong action to demand freedom of religion and the protection of fundamental human rights.** The world should put pressure on the government of Pakistan to stop each and every one of the culprits fuelling hatred and inciting violence, which has led to the brutal targeted killings of Ahmadis, in broad daylight, even in front of their young children, and to bring justice to the families of those killed Pakistan professes to be a democratic Islamic state.

**We strongly urge the international community to urge the Government of Pakistan to live up to its responsibility,** to provide effective protection and freedom of religious practice to the Ahmadis, to bring the perpetrators of these heinous attacks to justice, and to bring its laws and practices in line with international standards, as mandated by Articles 20, 2 and 18 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Articles 25 and 26 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

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## **Council of Islamic Ideology asks for even harsher persecution of the Ahmadis**

***While the legal saga of Mubarak Ahmed Sani remains subject to conflicting interpretations, what is clear is that Sunni authorities want the repression to continue.***

By Massimo Introvigne

[Bitter Winter](#) (20.08.2024) - The battle about the Mubarak Ahmed Sani case and the decision issued last February by the Chief Justice of Pakistan's Supreme Court is difficult to understand for non-Pakistanis, primarily because Pakistanis themselves disagree with each other on the meaning of the verdict.

The decision concerned the possibility for the persecuted members of the Ahmadiyya community to print and disseminate the "Tafseer-e-Sagheer," the shorter version of the 10-volume "Tafseer-e-Kabeer," the commentary to the Holy Quran by Mirza Basheer-ud-Din Mahmood Ahmad, the son and successor of Ahmadiyya founder Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. A man called Mubarak Ahmed Sami had been arrested on January 7, 2023, for disseminating the "Tafseer-e-Sagheer," thus breaching a Punjab law of 2021 prohibiting the printing and distributing of "heterodox" editions and commentaries of the Holy Quran. The man claimed that he had distributed the book in 2019, when the law was not yet in force. The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court Qazi Faez Isa agreed with him, noted that criminal laws cannot be retroactive, and had him released.

It was immediately clear that the decision was perceived differently by different sectors of the population in Pakistan. Some legal scholars hailed the decision as a step, modest but real, in favor of religious liberty, as Ahmadis rarely win court cases. The Ahmadiyya community largely did not perceive it as such, as the decision did not establish their right to print and distribute the "Tafseer-e-Sagheer" or other publications and was only based on the issue of non-retroactivity. Radical Sunni Muslims, on the other hand, took to the streets insulting the Chief Justice for having "sided with the Ahmadis."

The controversy led the Supreme Court to the rare decision of having the February verdict re-examined by a panel of three judges, including the Chief Justice, who [on July 24 issued a lengthy explanation](#). The Justices clarified that they do believe that the Ahmadis are heterodox and cannot call themselves Muslims, nor are they allowed to propagate their ideas outside of their places of worship. The February decision, the Justices said, was only based on the issue of retroactivity.

However, the July 24 verdict did not appease the radical Sunni Muslims either. The reaction came from the Council of Islamic Ideology, which is not a private organization but a constitutional body charged with giving advice to the Parliament and the government on Islamic issues. While it is unclear whether the Council also objected to the Supreme Court's comments on retroactivity, it considered "scandalous" and "perturbing the whole nation" the fact that the Justices stated in paragraph 42 of their decision that the Ahmadis are not allowed to profess their faith "outside of their places of worship." This means that they can profess their faith "inside" their places of worship.

The Council [commented](#) that “the latter part of paragraph 42, which permits Ahmadis to profess or preach within their places of worship should be reconsidered. They must not be allowed to profess or preach in any manner even within their houses, community centers or in places of worship... They must not be permitted to profess or preach openly, inside their houses or otherwise, as their actions directly desecrate the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), Islam, the Quran, and the Sunnah. They should be unequivocally declared as apostates.”

It seems that the Council, an official Pakistani Constitutional body, asks that the Ahmadis should be even more persecuted than they are now. Ironically, its comments came a few days before on Minorities Days, August 11, [President Asif Ali Zardari affirmed](#) “Pakistan’s commitment to protecting the religious, social, political, and economic rights of its minorities.”

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## **UN experts urge immediate end to discrimination and violence against Ahmadis**

[UN](#) (25.07.2024) - A group of independent experts\* today expressed grave concern regarding a reported upsurge in discrimination and violence against Ahmadi Muslims in Pakistan, including extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests and detentions, attacks on places of worship and curtailment of free expression, peaceful assembly and association.

“We are alarmed by ongoing reports of violence and discrimination against the Ahmadiyya community in Pakistan. We urge Pakistani authorities to take immediate action to address this situation,” the experts said. “Urgent measures are necessary to respond to these violent attacks and the broader atmosphere of hatred and discrimination which feeds it.”

The experts highlighted specific incidents over recent months, including the extrajudicial killing of two Ahmadis in Saad Ullah Pur on 8 July 2024, and the President of the Bahawalpur Ahmadiyya Muslim Community on 4 March 2024. They noted that an alarming number of attacks on Ahmadi places of worship and cemeteries have been reported since the beginning of 2024, some of which had resulted in serious injury to worshippers. “The Ahmadiyya community, their places of worship and cemeteries, must be given effective protection from attacks and vandalism,” the experts said.

They also expressed concern regarding alleged arbitrary arrests and detentions of Ahmadi worshippers over their religious holiday period, to prevent or obstruct their participation in their religious practices.

“Ahmadis’ right to peacefully manifest their beliefs must be respected. Discriminatory arrests and detentions which prevent religion or belief observance represent serious violations of their human rights, including freedom of expression, freedom of peaceful assembly and of association. “Judicial harassment serves to normalise violence against Ahmadis by non-State actors,” the experts said.

The violations are considered to reflect an atmosphere of widespread hostility towards Ahmadis in Pakistan. The experts commended the adoption of a resolution on 23 June 2024, by the Pakistan National Assembly, which strongly urged Federal and Provincial Governments to ensure the safety and security of all citizens of Pakistan, including religious minorities.

"The Resolution by the National Assembly is a welcome step. However, such good-faith efforts to counter discriminatory discourse will be ineffective unless they address its structural drivers," the experts said. "These include blasphemy laws and discriminatory legal provisions which situate Ahmadis, their legal representatives and allies, and other religion or belief minorities, in grave danger of human rights violations."

In light of its forthcoming second review under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the experts urged Pakistan to implement [recommendations](#) by the Human Rights Committee subsequent to its first review in 2017. These recommendations include the repeal or amendment of blasphemy laws to ensure compliance with the ICCPR, and bringing to justice those who incite or engage in violence against others based on allegations of blasphemy.

The experts have written to the Government of Pakistan and raised these concerns. "We stand ready and willing to support the Pakistani Government in the effective implementation of its obligations under the ICCPR and other international human rights instruments," the experts said.

\*The experts: **Matthew Gillett** (Chair), **Ganna Yudkivska** (Vice-Chair on Communications), **Priya Gopalan** (Vice-Chair on Follow-Up), **Miriam Estrada-Castillo and Mumba Malila**, [Working Group on Arbitrary Detention](#) ; **Morris Tidball-Binz**, [Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions](#) ; **Irene Khan**, [Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of opinion and expression](#) ; **Nazila Ghanea**, [Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief](#) ; **Gina Romero**, [Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association](#) .

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## **Pakistani court sentences Christian man to death for posting hateful content against Muslims**

BY ASIM TANVEER

[AP News](#) (02.07.2024) - A court in Pakistan sentenced a Christian man to death for sharing what it said was hateful content against Muslims on social media after [one of the worst mob attacks on Christians](#) in the eastern Punjab province last year, his lawyer said Monday, adding he will appeal the verdict.

In August 2023, groups of [Muslim men burned dozens of homes and churches](#) in the city of Jaranwala after some residents claimed they saw two Christian men tearing out pages from Islam's holy book, the Quran, throwing them on the ground and writing insulting remarks on other pages, authorities said. The two men were later arrested.

No casualties were reported at the time as terrified Christians fled their homes to safer areas. Though the police arrested more than 100 suspects following the attacks, it remained unclear if any were convicted.

Ehsan Shan, though not party to the desecration, was accused of reposting the defaced pages of the Quran on his TikTok account, his lawyer Khurram Shahzad told The Associated Press on Monday. He also said he would appeal against the death sentence issued Saturday by a court in the city of Sahiwal in Punjab province.

Amir Farooq, a police officer who arrested Shan, said the man shared "the hateful content at a sensitive time when authorities were already struggling to contain the violence."

Naveed Kashif, a local priest at a church in Sahiwal, said while he didn't excuse what Shan posted, he wondered "why the court ordered such an extreme verdict when those linked to the attacks are yet to be punished."

Blasphemy accusations are common in Pakistan. Under the country's blasphemy laws, anyone found guilty of insulting Islam or Islamic religious figures can be sentenced to death. While authorities have yet to carry out a death sentence for blasphemy, often just the accusation can cause riots and incite mobs to violence, lynching and killings.

On June 3, [72-year-old Nazir Masih died](#) after he was attacked by an angry mob in May following accusations of blasphemy.

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## **Threat to public safety, three Ahmadis detained ahead of Eidul Adha ritual**

***The three Ahmadis are current and former local community office bearers and have been held in the district jail for 30 days***

[The Friday Times](#) (12.06.2024) - The district administration in Chakwal has decided to pre-emptively detain three members of the local Ahmadiyya Community ahead of Eidul Adha on the pretext that these individuals may indulge in "unlawful activities and acting in a manner prejudicial to the public safety or the maintenance of the public order."

The Chakwal Deputy Commissioner Quratulain Malik, on June 10, 2024, issued three notifications (Nos 2253-2255), approving the detention of three individuals under Section 3(1) of the Maintenance of Public Order (MPO) Ordinance 1967. The three individuals are Tahir Ahmed, Malik Naveed Ahmed and Riaz Ahmed Malik.

All three are residents of the Dulmial in Tehsil Choa Saidan Shah.

In the notice, the Chakwal District Police Officer told Deputy Commissioner Malik that these men "may cause deterioration for law and order situation in the area" while describing the individuals as "miscreants."

The notification further said that the matter had been discussed in the district intelligence committee, which met on June 10, 2024, and unanimously recommended "that in order to prevent society from their (sic) activities, which are quite detrimental to public peace

and tranquility, sectarian harmony, as well as law and order situation, it is very necessary that they (sic) may be detained under section 3(1) of the MPO, 1960."

"Considering the above-mentioned grounds given by the district police officer Chakwal and evidence of his conduct being prejudicial to public peace as depicted in the report of the district police officer, Chakwal, I am fully satisfied that in order to prevent the said person from acting in any manner prejudicial to public safety or the maintenance of public order, their detention is necessary and expedient in public interest."

The deputy commissioner subsequently approved their detention in the district jail for the next 30 days.

The move, however, was deplored by the Ahmadiyya community.

The community said that Malik Naveed Ahmad was the incumbent president of the Ahmadiyya Community in Chakwal, Malik Riaz Ahmad was the former president, and Malik Tahir Ahmad was the secretary general of affairs.

The community claimed that the DPO called these individuals in for a meeting with the relevant Station House Officer (SHO) and Assistant Commissioner for Choa Saidan Shah. The Ahmadiyya Community delegation was pressurised not to perform the ritual sacrifice (Qurbani) on Eidul Adha. The community further claimed that during the meeting, the complainants (opponents of the Ahmadiyya Community) were also present.

The Ahmadiyya delegation informed the officials that there exists no prohibition in law where Ahmadis are barred from performing the sacred rite of Qurbani. Moreover, the Ahmadiyya delegation quoted the recent judgement from the Supreme Court of Pakistan in the case of Tahir Naqash etc vs The State etc, and authored by Justice Mansoor Ali Shah, where it is clearly stated that Ahmadis have the right to practice their faith within the confinement of four walls.

They further claimed that while the complainants were allowed to leave after presenting their case, the Ahmadiyya delegation was detained until the evening, and afterwards, the said three Ahmadis named were detained under section 3(1) of the MPO in Jhelum's jail.

"This year, the harassment of Ahmadis is visibly higher than last year," the community said in a statement, adding that members of their community are not only being forced not to perform the ritual sacrifice, but they are also being forced not to offer the Eidul Adha prayers.

### ***Police to demolish minarets atop worship place***

In a separate incident, officials at a police station in Lahore have indicated their intention to demolish minarets erected atop the local Ahmadiyya place of worship (Baitul Zikr) in the Jahman neighbourhood. This worship place was built in 1970 and thus cannot be subjected to the 1984 law against Ahmadis.

"This is a clear violation of Lahore High Court Justice Tariq Saleem Sheikh's decision (Para 16) that protects the minarets of Ahmadiyya places of worship constructed before 1984."

This alleged proclamation from the police and complainants was against the spirit of Tassaduq Jilani's judgement, who, in his 2014 judgement, had called on the police to protect the places of worship of every religion, the community claimed.

"By ordering to demolish parts of Ahmadiyya places of worship, how is the police carrying out Justice Jilani's orders?"

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## USCIRF condemns violence against Christians

***Nazir Gil Masih, lynched by a mob in Sargodha, died in the hospital. The situation is no longer tolerable, the American commission says.***

By Massimo Introvigne

[Bitter Winter](#) (11.06.2024) - Nazir (Lazar) Gil Masih didn't make it. The 74-year-old Christian escaped a mob's lynching attempt in Sargodha, Pakistan, on May 25 alive. But he passed away in the hospital on June 3. [As "Bitter Winter" reported](#), the mob's attack was a combination of sectarian bigotry and the jealousy of business competitors who fabricated the accusations of blasphemy and instigated the mob.

Elections are celebrated, governments change, but the persecution of religious minorities in Pakistan remains the same. On June 7, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom [reacted with a strong statement](#). 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.

After offering a summary of the Sargodha tragedy, the USCIRF commented that, "The brutal killing of Lazar Masih is an alarming reminder of the dangers of merely being suspected or accused of blasphemy in Pakistan, The country's draconian blasphemy law signals to society that alleged blasphemers deserve severe punishment, which emboldens private individuals and groups to take matters into their own hands. Pakistani authorities must hold those responsible for his death accountable."

The USCIRF adds that, "This latest wave of mob violence comes nearly one year after the [Jaranwala attacks](#), where thousands of individuals attacked Christian homes and burned 24 churches following false accusations of blasphemy, prompting several Christian families to flee their homes. In addition to inciting violence towards religious minorities, blasphemy accusations often lead to lengthy prison sentences on death row or solitary confinement."

The reaction of Pakistani authorities has been an attempt to make blasphemy laws not better but worse. The USCIRF notes that, "In January 2023, Pakistan's National Assembly unanimously passed an amendment to the country's blasphemy law, expanding punishable offenses and offering harsher punishments for blasphemy. In August 2023, the Senate passed the bill. The bill still requires the president's signature before becoming law."

Predictably, the statement concludes, "There has been an increase in blasphemy cases in Pakistan and USCIRF is deeply concerned that the pending amendment to the country's blasphemy law may exacerbate current trends."

The American commission also mentions the anti-Ahmadi laws and the continuous persecution of the [Ahmadiyya Community](#).



## Christian attacked by mob over blasphemy accusations dies from injuries

[Nova Kruijning | Maastricht U. Faculty of Law, NL](#)

[Jurist News](#) (04.06.2024) - A Pakistani Christian who was attacked by a mob last month after being accused of blasphemy has succumbed to his injuries, local media [reported](#) Monday. Nazir Masih, 72, sustained severe head injuries during the May 25 [attack](#) and underwent two surgeries before his death. He was buried in Sargodha, a city in Pakistan's Punjab province.

Masih was injured after more than 100 men [attacked](#) him and his son over allegations they desecrated pages of the Holy Qur'an, Islam's holy book. Pakistan's anti-blasphemy laws, introduced in the country in the 1980s, prohibit the insulting of Islam. Anyone found guilty of violating these laws can be sentenced to death.

Local media [say](#) police have registered cases against 500 people for their attack on Masih, his son, and their home. The identities of the suspects have not yet been disclosed, but participants in the mob [reportedly](#) belong to Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), a far-right party known for its radical extremist ideologies and violent protests against any change to the blasphemy law in Pakistan. The group previously [registered](#) a blasphemy case against Masih.

The incident exposes the plight of religious minorities in Pakistan, where 96.47 percent of the population identifies as Muslim and Christians make up only 1.27 percent of the country's population. Christian groups say the community is [routinely](#) subjected to religious persecution—including large-scale abductions, physical violence, and societal discrimination. In April, Christian [teenager](#) Ashbeel Baber Ghouri was arrested on charges of blasphemy after criticizing plural marriage and polygamy, which is permitted by certain interpretations of the Islamic faith, during a discussion with his Muslim friend.

In the wake of the attack and Masih's death, Pakistan Ulema Council (PUC) Chairman Hafiz Ashrafi [expressed](#) his deep grief over the killing, calling the attack "unlawful" and "illegal" and demanding justice for Masih and his family. The Ulema Council is a Muslim organization whose members include Islamic clerics and legal scholars from a range of Islamic traditions. Commenting on Masih's death, Ashrafi said that Muslim citizens and the state have a duty to protect non-Muslims in Pakistan.

Additionally, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) released a fact-finding [report](#) discussing the May 25 mob violence incident. The HRCP found that it was "highly likely" that the May 25 attack was targeted against Nazir Masih's family, beginning as a personal dispute that was "given a religious color" to "exact maximum leverage:"

Despite the death of Nazir Masih, the Punjab government has attempted to downplay the incident by reportedly discouraging press coverage and failing to condemn the incident unequivocally. We have seen this pattern of violence before. We should not have to see it again and again.

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## Christians call for a National Day Against Abduction and Forced Conversion of Girls

***Protestants and Catholics will unite on May 26 to ask for an end to the kidnapping, forced conversion to Islam, and forced marriage of young women from minority religions.***

By Massimo Introvigne

[Bitter Winter](#) (17.05.2024) - It is a plague denounced by religious minorities, by a few international media, including "[Bitter Winter](#)," and even [by the United Nations](#), in fact [two times](#). Girls from minority religions, primarily Hindu and Christian, are routinely kidnapped in Pakistan, forcibly converted to Islam, and forcibly married to their abductors, who in most cases have already raped them. Some shrines and mosques managed by radical clerics have converted themselves into "factories" of false conversions. Many of the victims are minor girls, but their kidnappers claim that birth certificates in Pakistan are often incorrect, and their "biological age" is in fact 18 or older.

The police do act in some cases, but courts of law are extremely reluctant to declare conversions to Islam invalid. They rely on suspicious videos where the victims state that they converted and married out of their own will. Even in cases where girls unequivocally tell them that they were kidnapped and did not want to convert, as it happened with [Chandra Maharaj](#), the courts do not believe them and declare the marriages valid.

Now Christians have decided that enough is enough. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of Pakistan, the Protestant National Council of Churches, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, and the Christian Awakening Movement have decided to join forces and to call for a national day of protest, May 26 next, against the abduction, forced conversion, and forced marriage of Christian girls. All sermons in all Christian churches throughout Pakistan on Sunday May 26 will be devoted to the issue.

Christians are aware that the problem also affect other religious minorities, and that there are Muslims who condemn this obnoxious practice. They have asked all religious communities in Pakistan to join with them on May 26 and ask the government to act.

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## **A good Supreme Court decision for the Ahmadis—but what's next?**

***The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court ordered the release of a man who had distributed an Ahmadi commentary to the Holy Quran. A step in the right direction, but problems remain.***

By Massimo Introvigne

[Bitter Winter](#) (12.02.2024) - Reportedly, a poor miller who managed to win a case against the all-powerful 18th-century King of Prussia Frederick the Great commented "There is a judge in Berlin," meaning a honest and impartial magistrate who would not be intimidated by the government. We often read that this quote was invented by playwright Bertolt Brecht, but it might have originated before him.

There is a judge in Islamabad, too. While the country was busy with the elections, Pakistan's Supreme Court Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa issued on February 8 a positive, if circumspect, ruling about the right of the persecuted Ahmadiyya community of printing and disseminating the "Tafseer-e-Sagheer," the shorter version of the 10-volume "Tafseer-e-Kabeer," the commentary to the Holy Quran by Mirza Basheer-ud-Din Mahmood Ahmad, the son and successor of Ahmadiyya founder Mirza Ghulam Ahmad.

A man called Mubarak Ahmed Sami had been arrested on January 7, 2023 for disseminating the "Tafseer-e-Sagheer," thus breaching a Punjab law of 2021 prohibiting the printing and distributing of "heterodox" editions and commentaries of the Holy Quran. The man claimed that he had distributed the book in 2019, when the law was not yet in force.

Chief Justice Isa ordered the defendant, who had remained in jail for thirteen months, immediately released against the posting of a symbolic bond of 5,000 rupees (\$18).

The Chief Justice may have based its decision only on the fact that penal law cannot be retroactive and asked the lower courts to consider whether the facts occurred in 2019 or 2022, but he went one step further.

He asked the courts of merit to meditate on religious liberty and on the Quranic teaching (2:256) "There is no compulsion in religion." As [reported by "Dawn,"](#) he said that "even Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was told by Almighty Allah that he was required to only convey the message and should not compel people to believe, as stipulated in verses from Surah Ar-Ra'd and Surah Yunus."

"Freedom of faith—the decision says—is one of the fundamental tenets of Islam. But sadly, in matters of religion tempers flare up and the Quranic mandate is forsaken...The Holy Quran requires that all matters of significance should be pondered over and reflected upon Surah An-Nahl (chapter 16), verse 44 and Surah Yunus (chapter 10), verse 24... They should also have considered verse 9 of Surah al-Hijr (chapter 15) where Allah says, 'We have, without doubt, sent down the Message; and we will assuredly guard it.'"

Isa also observed that the principle "no compulsion in religion" inspires Clause (a) of Article 20 of the Constitution of Pakistan, stating that "every citizen shall have the right to profess, practice and propagate his religion," Clause (b) of the same Article 20, which adds that "every religious denomination and every sect thereof shall have the right to establish, maintain and manage its religious institutions," and Article 22's prescription that "no religious community or denomination shall be prevented from providing religious instruction for pupils of that community or denomination in any educational institution maintained wholly by that community or denomination." "These fundamental rights cannot be derogated from, circumvented or diluted... The functionaries of the state [should have] heeded the Holy Quran, considered the Constitution and examined the law."

The defendant is not off the hook and his trial will continue. Isa, however, did not limit his examination of the case to the non-retroactivity of criminal laws. He affirmed a broader principle of religious liberty, including the right to transmit one's faith through appropriate means—and books.

Yet, Isa knows very well that there are laws in Pakistan explicitly targeting the Ahmadis and that the attitude of local police and courts is governed by politics rather than by law only. Isa's affirmation of freedom of religion is a step in the right direction, but more is needed to align Pakistan with full-blown democracies where religious liberty is recognized to unpopular minorities as well.

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## **Islamic studies no longer compulsory for Pakistan's non-Muslims**

By *Kamran Chaudhry*

**UCA News (24.01.2024)** - The Pakistani government has decided that the study of Islam is no longer compulsory for non-Muslim students in [Pakistan](#). In a notification on Jan. 22, the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training approved a new curriculum, which makes studying Islam non-compulsory for Christian, Bahai, Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, and Zoroastrian students in the Islamic nation.

The Religious Education Curriculum 2023 for Grades 1 to Grade 12 will be introduced from the next academic year in 2024-2025.

The Catholic Church has been urging the government to make provision for non-Muslim students to receive religious education in their faith instead of Islamiyat, which comprises courses on Islamic beliefs and practices.

Naeem Yousaf Gill, director of the National Commission of Justice and Peace, the rights body of the Pakistani bishops' council, welcomed the development.

"We appreciate the government for involving Catholic bishops in developing the syllabus of Christianity. However, its monitoring and implementation is another challenge. Policies for minorities often flop in our country," he told UCA News.

Pakistan has one of the lowest budgetary allocations for education in South Asia. The nation allotted 1.7 percent of its GDP for education in the fiscal year 2022-23 against 1.4 percent earlier.

"The long-term process will require training of teachers and a salary structure," Gill observed.

In 2020, the provincial Punjab government made it compulsory for Muslim students to study the Quran, and non-Muslim students were asked to study ethics in lieu of Islamiyat from Grade 3.

Jaipal Chhabria, president of the Pakistan Hindu Forum, rejected teaching religious studies in educational institutes.

"Civilized nations don't do it. It was never the vision of our founding father [Mohammed Ali Jinnah]," he said.

"You are free, you are free to go to your temples. You are free to go to your mosques or any other places of worship in this state of Pakistan," Jinnah had said in a speech to the nation after independence from Britain.

"In an environment where the majority thinks its religion is superior, it is impossible for a Muslim teacher to teach Christianity or Hinduism," said Chhabria.

In the last national census of 2017, Pakistan had 2.6 million Christians who made up 1.27 percent of a population of 207 million. Hindus were at 1.73 percent.