

Table of Contents

- ***A controversial new religious legislation***
 - ***Why shouldn't the Ahmadi Muslim asylum-seekers be deported from Europe to Pakistan?***
 - ***Declassification and discrimination of Jehovah's Witnesses***
 - ***Arbitrary arrests and torture by law enforcement in Azerbaijan***
-

A controversial new religious legislation

Oral statement of Human Rights Without Frontiers at the OSCE Human Dimension Conference in Warsaw

HRWF (07.10.2024) - Human Rights Without Frontiers is deeply concerned about the newest version of the Religion Law submitted to comments in Kyrgyzstan as state registration remains an unavoidable obligation and prerequisite to the legal practice of any religious activity. It also imposes re-registration every five years and restricts the freedom to share one's beliefs in the public square.

Engaging in religious activity without official sanction would be a criminal offense. The new legislation would additionally tighten registration requirements for a religious community, such as increasing the threshold for the number of required founders.

While officials contend the changes are needed to combat extremism and ensure public safety, critics say the new legislation would give authorities excessive opportunities to restrict foreign spiritual influences and to control the spiritual life of citizens.

The government likewise seeks to tighten control over the discussion of religious matters on the Internet. The bills would ban the publication of materials deemed offensive to believers or which promote the superiority of one religious belief over another. Other provisions could potentially punish women who wear religious attire, such as a niqab or burqa.

Non-Muslim religious communities in Kyrgyzstan could end up being hurt the most by the changes. Representatives from various religious communities in Kyrgyzstan reported not being consulted about the content of the bills, with some saying they had not even seen the text of the proposed legislation. If the new legislation is adopted, it can be expected that many religious groups will become illegal and many churches will be closed down.

Why shouldn't the Ahmadi Muslim asylum-seekers be deported from Europe to Pakistan?

Speech of Human Rights Without Frontiers at a side-event organized at the OSCE Warsaw Human Dimension Conference

Willy Fautré, director of Human Rights Without Frontiers

HRWF (09.10.2024) - 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

March: Killing of Tahir Iqbal, the president of the local Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in Bahawalpur, who was gunned down by motorcyclists.

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.

July: The violence continued 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.

Ahmadis in prison

According to USCIRF Database of religious prisoners, 14 Ahmadis have been in prison for several years, on two main charges:

Blasphemy charges: 8

Posing as Muslims (Sacrificing animals on the Eid Holiday): 6

In June 2024: Across Pakistan more than 30 Ahmadis were arrested – including a 13 year old boy – for celebrating the Islamic festival of Eid.

Malik Usman Ahmad is detained for blasphemy.

On September 29, 2020, authorities arrested Ahmad after accusing him of sharing perceived blasphemous materials. He was charged with several offenses, including "inciting interfaith hatred" (Sec. 11 Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, 2016), "desecrating the Qur'an" (Sec. 295-B PPC), and "posing as Muslim" (Sec. 298-C PPC).

On June 29, 2021, the trial court added "intending to outrage religious feelings" (Sec. 295-A PPC) and "insulting the Prophet Muhammad" (Sec. 295-C PPC) to the charges against Ahmad.

In October 2023, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention released an opinion on Ahmad's detention, calling for his immediate release.

Mukhtar Ahmad is detained for posing as Muslim

On July 10, 2022, police in Faisalabad arrested Ahmad and other Ahmadis for sacrificing animals on the Eid-ul-Adha holiday. They were charged with "posing as Muslim".

Blasphemy and death penalty

18 Christians (4 are on the death row)
16 Muslims (8 are on the death row)
1 Hindu

Statistics 2023

Mosque attacks

In 2023, Pakistan witnessed **44 attacks** on Ahmadi mosques, many of which were carried out by the authorities themselves:

- 21 minarets demolished
- 2 arson attacks
- 5 kalima removed
- 7 mehrab demolished
- 6 mob attacks

Police cases

In a troubling trend, 13 faith-based criminal cases were initiated against Ahmadis in Pakistan in 2023

Human rights abuses against Ahmadis during Eid Festival

- 23 complaints against Ahmadis for carrying out the Eid sacrifice
- 13 Ahmadis formally accused in six cases
- 10 sacrificial animals illegally seized
- 89 Ahmadis harassed by the police

But Ahmadis can be arrested and prosecuted on many more charges.

Longstanding human rights violations

- Ahmadis are not allowed to identify themselves as Muslims. They are compelled to declare themselves non-Muslims in order to obtain a national identity card or a Pakistani passport, which contradicts their religious beliefs and impinges on their right to self identify
- Ahmadis are prohibited from publishing the Quran and its translation
- The entire written works of the founder of the Ahmadiyya Community remain banned in the Punjab province
- Multiple community magazines, periodicals and newsletters are banned in Punjab, including a magazine for children
- Ahmadi TV channels remain banned in Pakistan
- Ahmadis continue to be prohibited from holding their annual conference in their headquarters of Rabwah, as well as other public gatherings and events. The last one held in Pakistan was in December 1983, with 250,000 participants in attendance
- Ahmadis are not allowed to participate in national and local elections due to discriminatory laws and regulations that specifically target and exclude them from the electoral process
- Several denationalised Ahmadi educational institutes have not been returned to the community due to ongoing discriminatory policies and reluctance of authorities to restore their ownership rights

Declassification and discrimination of Jehovah's Witnesses

Oral statement of the Dutch branch of Human Rights Without Frontiers at the OSCE Warsaw Human Dimension Conference

HRWF (08.10.2024) - *Mensenrechten Zonder Grenzen Nederland* is deeply concerned about a decision in Norway which arbitrarily revoked the registration of Jehovah's Witnesses present in the country for over 130 years. This measure puts an end to their eligibility for state grants they had received for 30 years.

The registration of the Norwegian Jehovah's Witnesses as a religious organization for 39 years was put to an end on unclear and controversial grounds in 2022.

In addition, on 4 March of this year, the Oslo District Court upheld the decisions of the County Governor of Oslo and Viken who has denied Jehovah's Witnesses state subsidies since 2021. The financial loss is estimated at 1.6 million EUR for 2021. An appeal has been lodged.

We recommend that the Government of Norway

- cancel the discriminatory decision to remove the registration of Jehovah's Witnesses as a religious community;
- reconsider and reverse the denial of state grants since 2021;
- abide by their commitment to uphold fundamental freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution of Norway, the ICCPR and the European Convention on Human Rights for all citizens, including Jehovah's Witnesses.

State subsidies in Norway are not a gift. The Lutheran Church of Norway which is a state church is financially supported by the government and gets state subsidies proportional to the number of its members. For the sake of coherence and non-discrimination, the Constitution mandates that other religions should also benefit from the same financing system and get subsidies in proportion of the number of their members. Over 700 religious communities receive such state grants in Norway, including Orthodox parishes subordinated to Patriarch Kirill of Moscow who blessed Russia's war on Ukraine.

Arbitrary arrests and torture by law enforcement in Azerbaijan

Oral statement at the Warsaw Human Dimension Conference

HRWF (03.10.2024)

Recommendations

Human Rights Without Frontiers is concerned about the use of violence by the law enforcement in cases of arrests and interrogation of people peacefully expressing their ideas in the public space in Azerbaijan. We recommend that the Minister of the Interior sanction such policemen.

Statement about the facts

On 20 July of this year, eleven members of the Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light, a Shia-derivative new religious movement founded in 1999, were arrested for [publicly manifesting their faith](#) in Fountain Square, in Baku. Two of them were sentenced to a minimum of 30 days in prison for "hooliganism."

When the members of the religious community were arrested, they were just holding up images of their religious leaders and distributing brochures in Fountain Square, in Baku to share their specific beliefs which dissent from Shia Islam as it is regulated in the country.

Two of them, Rustam Gasimli and Neriman Shabandzade, were sentenced to 30 days in prison for "hooliganism."

They have recently testified publicly about the conditions of their arrest and interrogation at the police station.

Rustam and Neriman were dragged into a nearby building, where the officers began a brutal assault before transporting them to the police station. The beating took place for approximately 10-15 minutes until the police car arrived. They were then forcibly placed in the vehicle, where they were subjected to further threats, insults, and physical abuse.

Upon arriving at the police station, a dozen officers beat them relentlessly for 30 to 40 minutes. The violence intensified as officers targeted their faces, heads, and legs, with some even attempting to force brochures into their mouths.

The chief pressed his foot on his Rustam's throat and stomach, and even on his genitals.

Both prisoners were further humiliated when a baton was forcibly inserted into Rustam's backside. Neriman was then coerced into participating in the abuse but refused and they were beaten again.

In court, despite presenting their injuries as evidence and pleading for an investigation into police misconduct, their pleas fell on deaf ears. The judge dismissed their claims, refused to review surveillance footage, relied on false testimony from an officer who was not present during the beatings, and sentenced to 30 days in prison the two members of the Ahmadi Religion of Peace and Light.
