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## UN body urges Pakistan to end or amend blasphemy laws

[Christian Daily](#) (12.11.2024) - Expressing alarm over an increase in false blasphemy accusations in Pakistan, the UN Human Rights Committee last week urged repeal or amending of the country's harsh blasphemy laws.

The committee noted that false blasphemy accusations led to Islamist mob violence and recommended amending the laws in accordance with requirements of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

In Nov. 7 concluding observations of the committee's second periodic report on Pakistan, it stated concern over sections 295 and 298 of the Pakistan Penal Code, which carry severe penalties, including the death penalty, and have a disproportionate impact on religious minorities.

"It is also concerned about the increasing number of persons incarcerated under blasphemy charges, the high number of blasphemy cases based on false accusations, violence against those accused of blasphemy, fostering vigilante justice, and allegations of entrapment of persons, in particular young persons, on accusations of on-line blasphemy under cybercrime laws," the committee stated.

It emphasized ending use of cybercrime laws, such as the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) 2016, to prosecute and detain those accused of breaching blasphemy laws online. The committee also urged the government to investigate allegations of massive abuse of blasphemy laws in connection with cybercrime laws and publish the results of the inquiries.

"[The committee] is also concerned about the chilling effect that criminal defamation laws, blasphemy, sedition and counter-terrorism laws, and other recently passed legislation have on the exercise of freedom of expression by journalists, activists, human rights defenders and members of ethnic and religious minorities," it stated.

Urging Pakistan to take all necessary measures to guarantee prompt and fair trials for all persons charged with blasphemy or other offenses against religion, the committee highlighted jail conditions, stating that it was "also concerned about reports of abuse of women prisoners, including sexual violence, and that individuals accused of blasphemy are often placed in solitary confinement for extended periods of time. It remains concerned about the widespread recourse to prolonged pretrial detention."

### **Mob Violence**

The committee cited reports of increased violence and intimidation against religious minorities, along with the destruction of their worship places in Pakistan.

It also pointed out lack of protection of the religious minorities and lack of accountability for the crimes committed against them. The UN rights body recommended that Pakistan prevent all forms of discrimination and violence against religious minorities.

"The Human Rights Committee is deeply concerned about reports of the increase of discrimination, hate speech and crimes, mob violence, harassment, and intimidation against religious minorities, in particular Christians, Ahmadis, Hindus, Shias and Sikhs, as well as the destruction of their places of worship and cemeteries, as was the case in [Jaranwala](#) in August 2023," it stated. "In particular, [Pakistan] should take all the measures necessary to prevent violent attacks against persons accused of blasphemy, in particular those under police custody or in detention, and investigate these attacks, including mob lynchings and killings, ensuring that all perpetrators are prosecuted, convicted and appropriately sanctioned."

It added that authorities should ensure that all who incite or engage in violence based on allegations of blasphemy, as well as those who falsely accuse others of blasphemy, be brought to justice and duly punished.

### **Forced Conversion/Marriage**

Calling for immediate measures to protect women and girls, particularly religious minorities, from forced conversion to Islam and from forced marriage, the committee said the government "must raise the minimum age of marriage for both boys and girls to 18 years throughout the country without exceptions."

"[The committee] is concerned about reports of the persistent practice of abducting girls who belong to religious minorities and forcing them to marry – regardless of their age and the prevailing law – and convert to Islam under the threat of violence, which results in rape, trafficking and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence against these girls," it stated.

It expressed concern about reports of the widespread impunity surrounding these cases.

"Victims are usually not returned to their families during investigations but forced to stay with their abductors, including members of organized criminal groups, or placed in unnecessary and inappropriate alternative care facilities, with no or limited regard for child protection standards, exposing victims to further risk of exploitation, abuse and harmful practices," the committee stated.

It urged Pakistan to intensify efforts to eradicate forced conversions and forced marriages, including strengthening its legal framework and enforcement mechanisms.

"The state party should also ensure that all allegations of forced conversions and forced marriages of girls are promptly, impartially and effectively investigated, that those responsible are brought to justice, and that all victims have access to effective remedies and support services such as adequate shelters, legal aid, psychological counselling and rehabilitation programs," it stated.

While noting the adoption of the Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals Act 2021, the committee expressed concerns about frequent reports of forced disappearances, torture, killing, threats, and harassment of journalists and human rights defenders.

Pakistan should investigate such incidents, prosecute the perpetrators and compensate victims, it stated.

Expressing concern about alarmingly frequent internet shutdowns among other means of blocking social media platforms and online content, it called upon Pakistan to stop restricting freedom of expression and ensure that criminal laws and counter-terrorism legislation are not used to silence journalists and human rights defenders.

The committee noted that Pakistani legislation punishes with the death penalty more than 30 crimes, including non-violent offenses that do not meet the threshold of the “most serious crimes” within the meaning of the ICCPR, including blasphemy.

The committee considered reports from six nations – Ecuador, France, Greece, Iceland, Pakistan and Türkiye – during its 142nd session on Oct. 17-18 in Geneva. The concluding observations contain concerns and recommendations to implement the ICCPR and other related conventions.

Pakistan ranked seventh on Open Doors’ 2024 World Watch List of the most difficult places to be a Christian, as it was the previous year.

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## **Human rights advocates urge suspension of Pakistan from Commonwealth over blasphemy laws**

[EU Today](#) (25.10.2024) - The event, moderated by Gary Cartwright, publisher of EU Today, featured Joseph Janssen of the Jubilee Campaign, Willy Fautré, Director of Human Rights Without Frontiers, and Chris Blackburn, a media and security analyst.

The discussion highlighted Pakistan’s ongoing misuse of blasphemy laws and the persecution of religious minorities, with panellists unanimously calling for the country’s suspension from the Commonwealth.

The backdrop to the conversation was the biennial Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM), which took place in Samoa for the first time. As Commonwealth leaders gathered to discuss key global issues, the conference’s participants focused on Pakistan’s alarming human rights record, calling for Pakistan’s suspension from the Commonwealth due to its systemic violations of human rights, particularly its blasphemy laws.

### ***Pakistan’s Blasphemy Laws: A Tool for Oppression***

At the heart of the discussion was Pakistan’s notorious blasphemy laws, which have been used to target religious minorities and dissidents, often leading to extrajudicial killings. Blasphemy laws, which criminalise actions or speech perceived to insult Islam, have led to a culture of fear and violence. Accusations of blasphemy, often unfounded or

motivated by personal vendettas, have resulted in mob lynchings, burnings, and public executions, frequently without any legal proceedings.

Joseph Janssens, a Christian of Pakistani origin and an advocate with the Jubilee Campaign, had recently returned from Pakistan, where he witnessed firsthand the devastating impact of these laws. He recounted multiple incidents where individuals accused of blasphemy were brutally murdered by mobs or even by the police, while the state failed to intervene or prosecute the perpetrators. Janssens pointed out that the violence is not confined to any one region of Pakistan, but is prevalent across the provinces, including Punjab, Sindh, and Balochistan.

One of the most harrowing cases highlighted by Janssens was that of Dr. [Shah Nawaz](#), a Muslim falsely accused of blasphemy in Sindh. Nawaz was lynched while in police custody, and his body was later burned by a mob. The state's complicity in these acts was further underscored when Janssens revealed that the officers responsible for his death were praised by extremist elements within the police force.

This pattern of violence and impunity extends beyond individual cases to entire communities, as religious sites, including churches, Ahmadiyya mosques, and Hindu temples, have been destroyed in the name of blasphemy.

The impact of these laws is far-reaching. As Janssens explained, mere accusations of blasphemy can lead to the destruction of livelihoods, the burning of homes, and the displacement of entire communities. He warned that Pakistan's failure to protect religious minorities and prosecute those responsible for mob violence has created a culture where impunity reigns, and where religious intolerance is growing by the day.

### ***International Response and the Commonwealth***

The discussion also touched on Pakistan's previous suspensions from the Commonwealth. Pakistan has been suspended twice before, in 1999 and 2007, due to military coups, but it was allowed to re-enter the organisation both times. The conference participants argued that Pakistan's worsening human rights record, particularly its blasphemy laws, justifies another suspension.

Cartwright noted that an open letter had been submitted to the Commonwealth Secretariat, calling for the suspension of Pakistan's membership due to its violations of the Commonwealth's core values, which include the protection of human rights.

Willy Fautré, an expert on human rights in Brussels, argued that Pakistan's actions are inconsistent with the principles of the Commonwealth Charter. He pointed out that despite pressure from international NGOs and repeated calls for reform, Pakistan's human rights situation has only deteriorated.

Fautré also stressed the importance of economic leverage in holding Pakistan accountable. He explained how Pakistan benefits from the EU's Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP+) status, which grants Pakistani goods duty-free access to the European market in exchange for meeting international human rights and labour standards.

However, Pakistan's failure to adhere to these standards, particularly in terms of religious freedom and labour rights, calls into question its continued eligibility for such economic privileges.

Fautré highlighted that the EU has the power to use its economic relationship with Pakistan to push for reforms but has so far failed to do so effectively. He expressed frustration that despite numerous conferences and appeals from human rights organisations, the European Commission has not taken meaningful action to review Pakistan's GSP+ status, which remains intact despite clear evidence of human rights abuses.

### ***Amplifying the Voices of Human Rights Defenders***

Chris Blackburn, a communications expert, emphasised the need to amplify the voices of human rights defenders in Pakistan. He pointed out that while the international community is well aware of the issues, more can be done to support those on the ground who are fighting for change. Blackburn also noted that the blasphemy laws are not only used against religious minorities but have also been wielded as a political tool to silence dissent within Pakistan.

Blackburn acknowledged that while the challenges are immense, there have been instances where international pressure has led to positive outcomes.

He cited the campaign against acid attacks in Pakistan, where sustained international attention and pressure resulted in legislative reforms and greater protections for victims. Blackburn argued that a similar approach could be applied to Pakistan's blasphemy laws, with coordinated pressure from international governments, NGOs, and civil society potentially leading to reform.

He also stressed that the Commonwealth, as an international body, must uphold its own standards. The Commonwealth Charter explicitly supports the promotion of democracy, the rule of law, and human rights. Blackburn questioned whether Pakistan, given its failure to protect religious minorities and uphold basic human rights, should continue to benefit from the international legitimacy that Commonwealth membership provides.

### ***The Path Forward: International Solidarity***

The conference concluded with a call to action. All participants agreed that the international community must take stronger measures to address the human rights crisis in Pakistan. Janssens reiterated the urgency of the situation, warning that without international intervention, the situation will only worsen. He called for sustained pressure on Pakistan, not just from the Commonwealth, but also from the European Union and the United Nations.

Fautré and Blackburn both emphasised that while sanctions and suspensions are necessary, they must be accompanied by a concerted effort to support human rights defenders in Pakistan. Amplifying their voices, providing them with international platforms, and ensuring their safety are crucial steps in pushing for lasting change.

The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Samoa provides a critical opportunity for member states to reaffirm their commitment to human rights. As the conference participants argued, Pakistan's continued membership in the Commonwealth undermines the very values the organisation is supposed to uphold. The suspension of Pakistan from the Commonwealth, along with the review of its economic privileges, would send a clear message that human rights violations will not be tolerated.

The panellists emphasised that while reform in Pakistan is a complex, challenging journey, international support remains crucial. Holding Pakistan to account and backing those striving for change could significantly impact the protection of lives and rights in the country.

The [proposal to suspend Pakistan from the Commonwealth](#) is framed not as punishment but as a necessary response to a deepening human rights crisis.

With the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting underway, there is a clear opportunity for the international community to address issues such as religious persecution, mob violence, and the role of state actors in human rights abuses. Suspending Pakistan's membership would affirm the Commonwealth's dedication to its core values and offer a degree of hope to those living under restrictive blasphemy laws.

### **Read also:**

[Call to Suspend Pakistan from the Commonwealth Over Blasphemy Laws & Human Rights Violations](#) (EU TODAY, 21 October 2024)

[Human rights advocates urge suspension of Pakistan from Commonwealth over blasphemy laws and human rights abuses](#) (EU TODAY, 25 October 2024)

[Suspension of Pakistan from Commonwealth Sought](#) (Christian Daily Asia, 25.10.2024)

[Human rights groups demand Pakistan's suspension from Commonwealth of Nations](#) (The Christian Post, 24 October 2024)

[Suspension of Pakistan from Commonwealth Sought](#) (Morning Star News, 24 October 2024)

[Call to Suspend Pakistan from Commonwealth Over Blasphemy Laws Sparks Global Attention](#) (Pax Christian News, 23 October 2024)

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## **A call for the suspension of Pakistan from the Commonwealth for blasphemy laws**

**To the Commonwealth Secretary-General,**

Ahead of the [Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting](#) in Samoa, 21-26 October 2024,

We, the undersigned, write to express our grave concern over the continued and escalating human rights abuses occurring in Pakistan, with particular attention to the use of Blasphemy laws. These laws have led to the wrongful arrest, imprisonment, and, tragically, the deaths of many individuals, including Christians, Ahmadis and other religious minorities, as well as those accused without trial or evidence.

The Commonwealth Charter acknowledges the challenges of modern times, referring to “unprecedented threats to peace and security, and a surge in popular demands for democracy, human rights and broadened economic opportunities.” These values, which form the core principles of the Commonwealth of Nations, are clearly being disregarded by the government of Pakistan.



Pakistan's Blasphemy laws, though not leading to any state-sanctioned executions to date, have fuelled a culture of vigilante violence and lawlessness.

Accused individuals, including members of religious minorities, students, politicians, and those suffering from mental health issues, have been brutally murdered before they can face trial. These extrajudicial killings often occur with the tacit approval, or at least the passive observation, of law enforcement officials, with no repercussions for the perpetrators.

Since 1990, local media and independent researchers have recorded at least 85 cases of individuals murdered in relation to blasphemy accusations. These victims have been lynched, burned alive, shot in courtrooms, and hacked to death in public. The frequency and impunity with which these crimes are committed underlines the systemic nature of the persecution faced by religious minorities and others who are falsely accused.

Despite international condemnation, the government of Pakistan has failed to reform these laws or protect its citizens from mob violence. Its inaction directly contravenes the values espoused by the Commonwealth and damages the credibility of the organisation as a force for promoting democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.

Given the severity of the situation and the Pakistani government's unwillingness or inability to uphold Commonwealth principles, we respectfully urge the Commonwealth Heads of State to consider suspending Pakistan from the Commonwealth of Nations.

As you are aware, Pakistan has been suspended twice before: from 18th October 1999 to 22nd May 2004, and from 22 November 2007 to 22 May 2008.

In both instances, the suspensions were in response to issues that compromised Pakistan's commitment to democratic governance and the protection of fundamental human rights.

We believe that decisive action is once again necessary. The Commonwealth cannot remain silent while one of its member states systematically violates the rights of religious minorities and fails to prevent the extrajudicial execution of its own citizens.

We urge you to act swiftly, applying pressure on the Pakistani government to put an end to the institutionalised persecution enabled by the Blasphemy laws. By suspending Pakistan from the Commonwealth, you will send a clear message that these egregious violations of human rights will not be tolerated within the Commonwealth community.

Yours sincerely,

## **Signatories**

### **Human Rights Without Frontiers, EU Transparency Registration (Brussels)**

Willy Fautré, director

### **Bitter Winter (Italy)**

Marco Respinti, director in charge

### **CAP/ Liberté de conscience with UN ECOSOC status (France)**

Thierry Valle, director

### **Center for Studies on Freedom of Religion Belief and Conscience/ LIREC (Italy)**

Raffaella di Marzi, director

### **Center for Studies on New Religions/ CESNUR (Italy)**

Massimo Introvigne, founder and managing director

### **European Association for the Defense of Minorities (Belgium)**

Manel Msalmi, president

### **European Federation for Freedom of Belief/ FOB (United Kingdom)**

Alessandro Amicarelli, chairman

### **European Sikh Organization, EU Transparency Registration (Belgium)**

Binder Singh, director

### **Forum for Religious Freedom (Austria)**

Peter Zoehrer, director

### **International Human Rights Committee (Sweden)**

Nasim Malik, secretary general

### **International Observatory of Religious Liberty of Refugees: ORLIR (Lithuania)**

Rosita Šorytė, co-founder and president.

### **Jubilee Campaign (United Kingdom)**

Joseph Janson, advocacy officer

### **Jubilee Campaign (USA)**

Hulda Fahmi, advocacy officer

## **Mensenrechten zonder Grenzen (Netherlands)**

Hans Noot, director

## **Set My People Free (Sweden)**

Kamal Fahmi, director

## **South Asia Democratic Forum, EU Transparency Registration (Belgium)**

Paulo Casaca, director

## **World Council for Public Diplomacy and Community Dialogue (Belgium)**

Andy Vermaut, president

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## **Pakistan should be suspended from the Commonwealth, NGOs say on the eve of the Summit**

***Call to suspend Pakistan from the Commonwealth over blasphemy laws &  
human rights violations***

**By Gary Cartwright**

**[EU TODAY](#) (21.10.2024) - Ahead of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Samoa from 21-26 October 2024, a growing chorus of voices has united to address a critical issue—the escalating human rights abuses in Pakistan.**

In particular, attention is being drawn to the country's notorious [blasphemy laws](#), which have led to the wrongful arrest, imprisonment, and tragic deaths of countless individuals. The victims of these laws include members of religious minorities such as Christians and Ahmadis, as well as individuals accused without credible evidence or trial.

Blasphemy laws have long been a controversial topic in Pakistan. Despite the country's efforts to establish itself as a democratic nation, these laws have created an environment where individuals are not only vulnerable to wrongful accusations but also face the threat of vigilante justice.

This reality not only tarnishes Pakistan's global image but also violates the very principles on which the Commonwealth is founded.

### ***The Blasphemy Laws and Their Deadly Consequences***

Pakistan's blasphemy laws, while officially not resulting in any state-sanctioned executions, have inadvertently created a culture of lawlessness and mob violence. Accusations of blasphemy, often based on flimsy or non-existent evidence, have led to horrific extrajudicial killings.

Religious minorities, students, politicians, and even those suffering from mental health issues are regularly targeted, with many losing their lives in brutal and public acts of violence. These include lynchings, immolation, shootings in courtrooms, and brutal hackings.

Local media and independent researchers have recorded at least 85 such killings since 1990, with most of these crimes occurring in full public view, often with law enforcement turning a blind eye.

The impunity enjoyed by the perpetrators of these heinous acts underscores the systemic nature of the persecution faced by Pakistan's religious minorities. It also highlights the Pakistani government's failure to uphold the rule of law and protect its citizens.

The Commonwealth Charter explicitly refers to the importance of human rights and the rule of law, stating that the organisation must address *"unprecedented threats to peace and security, and a surge in popular demands for democracy, human rights, and broadened economic opportunities."*

The Pakistani government's continued enforcement of the blasphemy laws and its passive acceptance of vigilante violence run counter to these values.

### ***International Condemnation and Pakistan's Inaction***

Despite repeated calls from the international community for reform, Pakistan has yet to take meaningful action to repeal or amend its blasphemy laws. The laws are frequently abused, often weaponised against religious minorities and political adversaries, creating an environment where fear and suspicion reign. Even worse, those accused of blasphemy are seldom afforded fair trials, as mobs often take matters into their own hands, exacting punishment with no legal process.

The lack of accountability for such crimes is glaring. Law enforcement authorities often turn a blind eye or act as passive observers during these mob attacks.

Perpetrators are rarely, if ever, brought to justice, reinforcing the dangerous message that such violence is permissible. This cycle of impunity not only fuels further atrocities but also emboldens those who seek to exploit the blasphemy laws for personal or political gain.

### ***Pakistan's Relationship with the Commonwealth***

Pakistan has a fraught history with the Commonwealth, having been suspended twice before—in 1999 and 2007—over issues related to democratic governance and the protection of human rights. On both occasions, the Commonwealth took decisive action to signal that violations of its core values would not be tolerated. Today, as Pakistan continues to flout the principles of human rights and democracy, there is a growing call for similar action.

The Commonwealth, with its commitment to upholding democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, cannot remain silent while one of its member states systematically violates these principles. The failure to address the institutionalized persecution enabled by Pakistan's blasphemy laws would not only undermine the credibility of the Commonwealth but also send a message that these violations are acceptable within its ranks.

### ***A Call for Action: Suspension from the Commonwealth***

In light of Pakistan's continued disregard for Commonwealth values, 17 human rights NGOs from the EU and beyond have called for the country to be suspended once again from the organisation.

This suspension would serve as a strong rebuke of Pakistan's human rights record and put pressure on the government to make meaningful reforms. The Commonwealth must

stand firm in its commitment to democracy and human rights by taking decisive action against member states that fail to uphold these principles.

Suspending Pakistan from the Commonwealth would send a powerful message—that the international community will not tolerate egregious violations of human rights. It would also offer hope to the many individuals in Pakistan who live in constant fear of persecution, simply because of their religious beliefs or because they have been falsely accused of blasphemy.

**As the Commonwealth Heads of Government prepare to meet in Samoa, the eyes of the world are on the organisation's ability to uphold its values.**

The situation in Pakistan presents a critical test of the Commonwealth's commitment to human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. By suspending Pakistan from the Commonwealth, the organisation would reaffirm its role as a global champion of these principles and stand in solidarity with those who are suffering under the country's repressive blasphemy laws.

Pakistan's blasphemy laws are not just a legal issue; they are a human rights crisis. As long as these laws remain in place, and as long as the government fails to protect its citizens from vigilante violence, the Commonwealth must be prepared to take a stand.

Suspension is a necessary step, not only to hold Pakistan accountable but to remind the world that human rights abuses have no place in the Commonwealth of Nations.

**Read the full letter here: [Open letter to the Commonwealth Secretariat pdf-Open letter to the Commonwealth Secretariat](#)**

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## **17-year-old Christian worker forcibly converted to Islam by his employer**

***Reportedly, Samsoon Javed was told he could either surrender his religion or his job. His mother suspects the real story may be even worse.***

*by Massimo Introvigne*

[Bitter Winter](#) (16.10.2024) - Forced conversions of Hindus and Christians to Islam are a well-known plague in Pakistan but the case of 17-year-old Samsoun Javed includes a somewhat new element. An impoverished Christian worker was offered the alternative of converting to Islam or losing his job, according to information her mother shared with local media and [journalists who regularly report](#) on freedom of belief issues on social networks.

Samina Javed, a brick kiln worker from Bhadru Minara village in Sheikhpura District, Punjab, and a member of a Brethren church, is the mother of Samsoun Javed. Samsoun's father, Falamoon Masih, passed away in 2018 due to illness. Samsoun is one of four children from that marriage. Samina is now married with a gentleman whose last name is Javed, from which she had another son.

In November 2023, Samsoun started a job at an LPG (Liquified Petroleum Gas) outlet owned by a Muslim man called Usman Manzoor. In July 2024, Umar Manzoor, Usman's brother, asked Samsoun to move and start working at his own LPG outlet. There the problems started, according to Samina.

In September, Samsoun did not come home from work. The parents visited Umar and he told them that Samsoun had converted to Islam and did not want to go back home or see them any longer.

The mother managed to visit Samsoun some days later, when Umar was traveling. During the short meeting, the son looked terrorized, Samina reported, and kept saying that he would be fired or worse if Umar would learn that he had met his mother.

Both Samsoun and her family are extremely poor. However, Samina does not believe that Samsoun is just afraid of losing his job, although this is something he can hardly afford. She suspects he is held by the Manzoor brothers and their religious leader against his will.

That it is abduction or just blackmail, the incident looks like another chapter in the sad history of conversions obtained through illegal means in Pakistan.

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## **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

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## Christian woman sentenced to death on blasphemy charges over WhatsApp messages

**[EU TODAY](#) (25.09.2024) - A Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) court in Rawalpindi has sentenced a Christian woman, [Shagufta Kiran](#), to death after finding her guilty of blasphemy. The verdict follows her arrest on July 29, 2021, for participating in a religious discussion on a WhatsApp group named "Pure Discussion." The complainant, Sheraz Ahmed Farooqi, alleged that her remarks were disrespectful towards Islam's Prophet Mohammed.**

**Shagufta Kiran** was charged under Section 11 of the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, 2016, alongside Sections 295-A, 298-A, 109, and 295-C of the Pakistan Penal Code—offences carrying severe penalties, including the death sentence for blasphemy. The ruling has left her family, particularly her four children, devastated by the court's decision.

**Rana Abdul Hameed**, Shagufta's defence lawyer appointed by the human rights organisation Voice for Justice, argued that the charges against his client were baseless and motivated by personal grievances. He emphasised that, according to Pakistan's legal framework, such cases require special government permission for registration—a requirement that was not met in this case. Hameed also pointed out the lack of credible evidence linking Shagufta to the alleged offense, raising concerns about the fairness of the trial. "The facts of the case raise significant doubts," Hameed said. "In a fair trial, Shagufta Kiran should have been presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt."

**Jubilee Campaign**, a Dutch-based organisation, has been providing legal aid and is preparing to appeal at the high court.

The four children of Shagufta Kiran are devastated by the court's decision to sentence their mother to death.

*"We have been crying since yesterday, and this news has brought even more pain and trauma to our entire family," said **Nidaal, Shagufta's daughter**. "For the past four years, we have suffered because of my mother's case. She has been kept in an isolation cell since 2021. God has put us in a great trial," Nidaal added in an interview with **EU Today**.*

**Joseph Jansen, advocacy officer at Jubilee Campaign in the Netherlands**, expressed serious concern over the escalating misuse of blasphemy laws in Pakistan. He

emphasised that religious minorities, especially Christians, are increasingly facing false accusations fueled by personal grudges, property disputes, or religious discrimination.

*"It is disturbing to see how easily blasphemy charges can be weaponised against religious minorities," Jansen remarked. "The lack of accountability for false accusations has only encouraged this abuse. It is crucial for authorities to enforce legal provisions to penalise perjury, which could help deter the wrongful application of these laws."*

Jansen further urged the Pakistani government to take immediate action to prevent the misuse of blasphemy laws and called for urgent reforms. These reforms, he suggested, should include making blasphemy-related offenses bailable and ensuring that arrests and investigations occur only with proper judicial oversight.

*"We must address the disproportionate penalties imposed under the blasphemy laws," Jansen remarked. "The government should also enforce measures to prevent the arrest of individuals without judicial warrants."*

Jansen also highlighted the broader implications of Pakistan's blasphemy crisis, pointing to the [violent attack on the Christian community in Jaranwala on August 16, 2023](#), where mobs armed with batons and sticks burned 26 churches and destroyed over 100 homes after allegations of Quran desecration.

*"A year has passed since the Jaranwala attack, yet the Christian minority still awaits justice," Jansen said. "There has been no accountability for the perpetrators of this violence. The growing misuse of blasphemy laws and persecution of religious minorities in Pakistan require immediate global intervention."*

Rights organisations called on the Pakistani government to immediately release Shagufta Kiran and ensure her and her family's safety.

They further urge the international community to speak out against the ongoing misuse of blasphemy laws in Pakistan and to advocate for the protection of religious minorities and the preservation of fundamental human rights. They emphasise the importance of ensuring that Pakistan fulfils its obligations under the [GSP+ status](#).

### **Read also:**

[Brussels Press Club: conference backs European Parliament call for suspension of Pakistan's GSP+ trading status with EU over human rights abuses](#)

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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](#).

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## **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 (HRC) released a fact-finding [report](#) discussing the May 25 mob violence incident. The HRC 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.