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## **Pregnant woman beaten in Pakistani jail granted bail**

***Police unable to find any evidence against her in theft charge***

*By Murad Khan*

Compass Direct News (30.12.11) / HRWF (18.01.12) – A judge this month granted bail to a Christian woman falsely charged with theft in Abbottabad after police failed to produce evidence incriminating her, she said.

Salma Emmanuel, 30, was freed on bail on Dec. 8. She and her husband were severely beaten for three days when they refused to confess, and she was taken to a hospital in critical condition on Nov. 7, the life of her unborn child also threatened (see [www.compassdirect.org](http://www.compassdirect.org), "Police in Pakistan Beat Pregnant Christian, Husband for 3 Days," Nov. 29).

Emmanuel told Compass by phone from Abbottabad, 50 kilometers (31 miles) northeast of Islamabad in the Hazara region of Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, that the judge granted bail after police failed to produce evidence against her. Her husband, 30-year-old TV repairman Emmanuel Rasheed, had been freed on bail on Nov. 17. Rasheed said that as he was mercilessly beaten, police tried to convert him to Islam.

Emmanuel said that her faith in God was strong from the beginning of her ordeal in the Muslim-majority country, where Christians are routinely denied legal rights.

"Both of us knew we were innocent, and that they would not be able to find anything against us," she said. "We had complete faith in the Lord that He will not forsake us, and our bails are a testimony to the fact."

Emmanuel said that police had discriminated against the couple from the outset.

"The police tortured both of us, and despite our hue and cry that we were not thieves, they continued with their harsh treatment," she said. "Now they have included the other servants in the investigation, but not once have they even touched them. They have just been questioned."

The couple lost their life savings – gold ornaments of 100 grams – and both have lost their jobs as a result of the false charges and are depending on relatives to cover their living expenses, she said.

"My husband goes out every day to find work but has been unsuccessful so far," she said. "This Christmas we didn't have money to buy clothes for our children, and neither

did we have any explanation to make them understand why we were so helpless. But we have witnessed the mercy of the Lord and have faith that this time shall pass, too.”

The couple has three children – the oldest 12, the youngest 5.

Emmanuel’s case was highlighted in Pakistan’s broadcast and print media when she was brought to the hospital in critical condition five months pregnant.

Ghazala Riaz, who employed Emmanuel as a maid in her house a year ago, on Oct. 30 accused the couple of theft, alleging that they had stolen a laptop, 900,000 rupees (US\$10,095) and 300 grams of gold ornaments, including Emmanuel’s own jewelry, which Emmanuel had given to Riaz for safekeeping the same day.

Police who beat Emmanuel and her husband threatened to kill her unborn child, but the Christian couple refused to confess a false allegation, they said.

Emmanuel, who was also working as a child-minder in a local school besides working as domestic help, has lost both her jobs. When Rasheed was jailed, his employer immediately found a replacement.

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## **Christian charged with ‘blasphemy’ after argument**

***Young man says landlord falsely accused him after dispute over rent***

*By Murad Khan*

Compass Direct News (26.12.11) / HRWF (18.01.12) – A young man has been charged with desecrating the Quran under Pakistan’s controversial “blasphemy” laws after the Christian had an argument over rent with his Muslim landlord, his attorneys said.

Police in Shahdara Town, near Lahore, arrested Khuram Masih, 23, on Dec. 5 and charged him under Section 295-B after his landlord, Zulfiqar Ali, accused him of burning pages of the Quran in order to prepare tea, the attorneys said. Section 295-B makes willful desecration of the Quran or use of an extract in a derogatory manner punishable with life imprisonment.

Masih told his attorneys he was falsely accused because he had had an argument with Ali earlier in the day over the rent of the house in which he and his wife, Bano, a convert from Hinduism, have been living along with five other families in recent months.

“The charges are completely fabricated,” Masih told attorneys. “Ali has accused me of burning pages of a quranic booklet that had been [later] placed in a cavity in the wall [to keep them from touching the floor], while the truth is that the walls of our room and courtyard are cemented, and there’s no hole or cavity where the pages could have been placed.”

Another of Ali’s tenants, a neighbor of Masih, told the landlord that he had seen Masih and Bano burning the pages of the Quran to make tea and spread the word to other area Muslims, according to the First Information Report (FIR). Soon a crowd of Muslims gathered near Masih’s house and started shouting slogans against the Christians, and Muslim leaders made announcements from several mosques calling for severe punishment of the Christian couple.

Ali, the main complainant in the FIR (No. 1112/11), states in the FIR that he had the couple arrested after he visited their house and found burned pages of an "Arabic Qaida," a small copy of the Quran. He states that the first two or three pages were burned and that Masih and Bano had probably used them along with some other materials for a fire to heat up water for tea.

Ali states in the FIR that he later realized Bano had no role in the incident, as she was sleeping while Masih prepared the tea. Police released her after questioning.

Masih, a low-income laborer, told a legal team from the Community Development Initiative (CDI), an affiliate of the European Centre for Law and Justice, that he had had an argument with Ali on the day of the incident and had found out about the charges only that evening.

Masih appeared in court on Saturday (Dec. 24), but the judge did not show up. A trial date is now scheduled for Jan. 7, with a bail hearing set for Jan 3.

A CDI team member told Compass that Masih was visibly shaken by the charges against him and wept as he sought protection for his wife, who is now living with Masih's relatives.

CDI Executive Director Asif Aqeel told Compass that his team has appointed Niaz Amer to handle Masih's case.

"The case is yet another example of how the blasphemy laws are misused to settle personal issues," Aqeel said. "There's no use moving for bail in the trial court because the lower courts cannot sustain pressure in such cases ... We will make efforts for his bail in the Lahore High Court once the proceedings begin."

Christian rights activist Khalid Shahzad told Compass that Masih didn't know about the charges until he went to police to get his wife released from custody.

"Masih didn't even know about the charges until then, because he wasn't home," Shahzad said.

Shahzad said that soon after news of the alleged desecration began spreading, he and other Christian leaders started efforts to defuse religious tensions threatening the lives and property of between 15,000 and 16,000 Christians living in the Shahdara area.

"Panic among Christians spread after announcements were made from mosques, and several people left their houses anticipating violence," he said. "Thank God the situation normalized in a couple of days, although we have strictly forbidden our boys from standing in groups outside their homes or in streets and from reacting on unconfirmed reports."

Shahzad said police were hasty in registering the case.

"They did not follow the procedure while booking Masih, as no police officer below the level of superintendent of police can investigate blasphemy charges," he said.

Mian Shafqat, officer in charge of the investigation, said that police had seized the allegedly burned pages from the "scene of the crime" and that police had proven that Masih had intentionally burned them.

Under Pakistan's internationally condemned blasphemy laws, conviction under Section 295-C for derogatory comments about Muhammad is punishable by death, though life

imprisonment is also possible. Section 295-A prohibits injuring or defiling places of worship and "acts intended to outrage religious feelings." It is punishable by life imprisonment, which in Pakistan is 25 years.

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## **A Christian labourer arrested on blasphemy charges in an attempt to convert his girlfriend to Islam**

AHRC (07.12.2011) / HRWF (13.12.2011) – <http://www.hrwf.net> – - The Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) has received information that a young Christian labourer was arrested on the charges of burning papers of Quran, a Muslim holy book for making tea at home. He surrendered to the court arrest when he was informed that his nephew had been taken into custody by the police in exchange of his arrest. A Muslim mob is protesting and has surrounded the houses of Christians after an announcement was made from the loudspeakers of different mosques. One hospital also came under attack due to presence of some Christians who were admitted there. It is alleged the Muslim neighbours of the victim were forcing his girl friend to convert to Islam otherwise she would be arrested on fornication charges and intentional rape and she would face death by stoning.

The Christian population of Haroonabad Dherh is in danger by the attack of extremists. Around 800 Christians are living in the area and there are more than half a dozen churches in the community and there are chances that they will be attacked at any moment.

### **CASE NARRATIVE:**

Khuram Sunny (24), son of Mr. Rasheed Masih, a resident of Majeed Park Muhalla Peer Bazar Shahdara Town Lahore, capital of Punjab province, was living with his girl friend who was Hindu by religion. He was working in Quetta, the capital of Balochistan province, where he fell in love with Ms. Rehana Bano. Their parents were not ready to agree to the marriage which compelled the couple to migrate to Lahore. He was staying in a rented one room house which was owned by Zulfiqar Ali, in Majeed Park Mohalla, a Muslim dominated community. Sunny was daily wage earner and working in a marble crushing factory from morning to night. In his absence the Muslim neighbours, particularly the female members of Zulfiqar family attempted to convert Bano to Islam and when she showed reluctance she was blackmailed by the Muslim neighbours into complaining to the police that they were living out of wedlock. She was told that she would be booked on charges of fornication, adultery and rape and that she would get the death sentence. It was strongly hinted that she would face death by stoning. On the day of the incident, 5 December, she was forced to call police via the emergency number 115 and complain that Sunny had made the tea by burning pages torn from the Quran.

The police came immediately and took Sunny's nephew into custody as a hostage for his surrender. At 2.30 pm Sunny went to the police station to inquire about the case where he was arrested on the charges of blasphemy under the 295 B of Pakistan Penal Code (PPC). His arrest was announced at 5 pm and at 7 pm all the mosques of the community through the loudspeakers' announcement instigated the Muslim population that Khuram Sunny has burnt the pages of the Quran for making tea. More than 1000 persons gathered outside the Shahdra town police station and demanded that Sunny be handed over to them so that they could kill him according to Islamic teachings.

The police have not followed the procedure to file case of blasphemy which made compulsory that no police officer below the level of Superintendent of Police can investigate charges of blasphemy but this was totally ignored. It seems that police was

complicit in the incident as the victim was arrested at 2.30 and mosques were informed after five hours of his arrest.

It is apprehended by the Christian community that Rehana Bano, the girl friend of the victim, would be forced to become a witness against Sunny.

### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:**

Militant Muslim organizations are using blasphemy laws as the best way to keep religious minority groups under pressure and even forcibly take land. The state is failing to protect the lives and property of minority communities. The blasphemy law has made it compulsory that no police officer below the level of Superintendent of Police can investigate the charges but this is rarely adhered to.

Recent cases in Pakistan suggest a criminal collaboration among government authorities, police, and fundamentalist organizations, in which the Muslim clergy, receiving bribes from land-grabbers in the National and Provincial Assemblies, colluded with local police to expropriate land owned by minorities by bringing blasphemy allegations against them. The situation is especially worrying in Punjab province after the formation of the PML-N government, which has a record of intolerant policies against Christians and Ahmadis in particular.

According to data compiled by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and cited by the U.S. State Department, a total of 695 people were accused of blasphemy in Pakistan between 1986 and April 2006. Of those, 362 were Muslims, 239 were Ahmadis, 86 were Christians, and 10 were Hindus. A Pakistani daily newspaper, Dawn, has reported that some 5,000 cases were registered between 1984 and 2004, and 964 people were charged with blasphemy. The religious breakdown of the defendants was similar to that cited by the State Department. The population of Pakistan is estimated at 173 million people, and according to the 1998 census, 97 percent of the population is Muslim; most are Sunni Muslims, with Shiite Muslims accounting for about 20 percent. The remaining 3 percent of the population is made up of Hindus, Christians, Ahmadis, Parsis, and Baha'is.

From these figures, it is clear that Pakistan's blasphemy laws are used prolifically and applied disproportionately to non-Muslims. Although many other countries have laws against blasphemy, the situation in Pakistan is unique in its severity and its particular effects on religious minorities.

### **SUGGESTED ACTION:**

Please write letters to the mentioned authorities for taking the case of false implication of Khuram Sunny in burning pages of the Quran for making tea. Please urge them release him and immediately stop the attacks on houses of Christians and Churches. Also urge them to take action against the officials of Shahdra town police station for their involvement in the instigation of Muslim population.

### **SAMPLE LETTER OF SUPPORT:**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

**PAKISTAN: A Christian labourer arrested on blasphemy charges in an attempt to convert his girlfriend to Islam**

#### **Name of victim:**

1. Mr. Khuram Sunny Son of Rasheed Masih (24), resident of Majeed Park Muhalla Peer Bazar Shahdara Town Lahore, capital of Punjab province
2. Ms. Rehana Bano, resident of Majeed Park Muhalla Peer Bazar Shahdara Town Lahore, capital of Punjab province

#### **Names of alleged perpetrators:**

1. Mr. Zulfiqar Ali, son of Sajjad Ali, resident of resident of Majeed Park Muhalla Peer Bazar Shahdara Town Lahore, capital of Punjab province
2. Officials of Shahdra police town station, Shahdra, old Lahore, capital of Punjab province

**Date of incident:** 5 December 2011

**Place of incident:** Majeed Park Muhalla Peer Bazar Shahdra town police station, Lahore, Punjab province

I am writing to voice my deep concern regarding the arrest of a young Christian, Khuram Sunny, on the charges of blasphemy for burning pages of Quran, the holy book of Muslims, for making tea.

I have been informed that Khuram Sunny Son of Rasheed Masih (24), resident of Majeed Park Muhalla Peer Bazar Shahdara Town Lahore, capital of Punjab province, was living with his girl friend who was Hindu by religion. He was working in Quetta, the capital of Balochistan province, where he fell in love with Rehana Bano. Their parents were not ready to agree to the marriage which compelled the couple to migrate to Lahore. He was staying in a rented one room house which was owned by Zulfiqar Ali, in Majeed Park Mohalla, a Muslim dominated community. He was daily wage earner and working in a marble crushing factory from morning to night. In his absence the Muslim neighbours, particularly the female members of Zulfiqar family attempted to convert Bano to Islam and when she showed reluctance she was blackmailed by the Muslim neighbours into complaining to the police that they were living out of wedlock. She was told that she would be booked on charges of fornication, adultery and rape and that she would get the death sentence. It was strongly hinted that she would face death by stoning. On the day of the incident, 5 December, she was forced to call police via the emergency number 115 and complain that Sunny had made the tea by burning pages torn from the Quran.

I am appalled to learn that the police came immediately and took Sunny's nephew into custody as a hostage for his surrender. At 2.30 pm Sunny went to the police station to inquire about the case where he was arrested on the charges of blasphemy under the 295 B of Pakistan Penal Code (PPC). His arrest was announced at 5 pm and at 7 pm all the mosques of the community through the loudspeakers' announcement instigated the Muslim population that Khuram Sunny has burnt the pages of the Quran for making tea. More than 1000 persons gathered outside the Shahdra town police station and demanded that Sunny be handed over to them so that they could kill him according to Islamic teachings.

I am shocked to learn that the police have not followed the procedure to file case of blasphemy which made compulsory that no police officer below the level of Superintendent of Police can investigate charges of blasphemy but this was totally ignored. It seems that police was complicit in the incident as the victim was arrested at 2.30 and mosques were informed after five hours of his arrest.

It is apprehended by the Christian community that Rehana Bano, the girlfriend of the victim, would be forced to become a witness against Sunny.

This is not new thing for me as because of the government's appeasement policy towards the militant Muslim organizations they are using blasphemy laws as the best way to keep religious minority groups under pressure and even forcibly take land. The state is failing to protect the lives and property of minority communities. The blasphemy law has made it compulsory that no police officer below the level of Superintendent of Police can investigate the charges but this is rarely adhered to.

But authorities never ask from the police that under which laws the blasphemy charges are quickly framed without following the legal process which gives good opportunity to

the Muslim groups to instigate the Muslim population against the religious minorities for burning their houses and religious cemeteries.

I therefore, urge you to immediately release Khuram Sunny and provide protection to him and his girlfriend, Rehana Bano, who would be intimidated to become a witness against him.

The officials of the Shahdra police station must be prosecuted for implicating falsely a Christian in the blasphemy case to insecure the Christian population. Please, also provide security to the Christian houses and half a dozen Churches which are in the Haroonabad Dhere Mohalla adjacent to the place of incident.

Yours sincerely,

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**PLEASE SEND YOUR LETTERS TO:**

1. Mr. Asif Ali Zardari  
President of Pakistan  
President's Secretariat  
Islamabad  
PAKISTAN  
Tel: 92-51-9204801-9214171  
Fax 92-51-9207458  
Email: publicmail@president.gov.pk

2. Mr. Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani  
Prime Minister  
Prime Minister House  
Islamabad  
PAKISTAN  
Fax: +92 51 922 1596  
Tel: +92 51 920 6111  
E-mail: secretary@cabinet.gov.pk or pspm@pmsectt.gov.pk

3. Federal Minister for Human Rights  
Ministry of Human Rights  
Old US Aid building  
Ata Turk Avenue  
G-5, Islamabad  
PAKISTAN  
Fax: +92 51 9204108  
Email: sarfraz\_yousuf@yahoo.com

4. Mr. Lateef Khosa  
Governor of Punjab  
Governor House  
Mall Road  
Lahore  
PAKISTAN  
Fax: +92 42 99203044  
Email: governor.sectt@punjab.gov.pk

5. Mr Nasir Mehmood Khosa  
Chief Secretary of Government of Punjab  
Punjab Secretariat  
Ravi Road, Lahore  
PAKISTAN  
Fax: +92 42 7324489



E-mail: chiefsecy@punjab.gov.pk

6. Mr. Rana Sana Ullah  
Minister of Law  
Government of Punjab  
Punjab Secretariat  
Ravi Road, Lahore  
PAKISTAN  
Fax: +92 42 99212004  
E-mail: law@punjab.gov.pk

7. Dr. Faqir Hussain  
Registrar  
Supreme Court of Pakistan  
Constitution Avenue  
Islamabad  
PAKISTAN  
Fax: + 92 51 9213452  
E-mail: mail@supremecourt.gov.pk

8. Inspector-General of Police, Punjab  
Police Head Office  
Lahore, Punjab province  
PAKISTAN  
Fax: +92 42 9921006

Thank you.

Urgent Appeals Programme  
Asian Human Rights Commission ([ua@ahrc.asia](mailto:ua@ahrc.asia))

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## **Family of convert seeks to track him down**

### ***Christian loses livelihood, relatives for leaving Islam***

By Murad Khan

Compass Direct News (08.12.2011) / HRWF (12.12.2011) – <http://www.hrwf.net> – When Malik Pauloos of Bhakkar district, Punjab Province finally decided to trust a close relative with the secret that he had left Islam for Christianity, there was no question in his relative's mind that Pauloos' relationship with the family was over.

The family had been custodian of an Islamic shrine, the Pir Syed Karamat Shah in Kot Islam, for three generations. Though Pauloos had moved to Karachi, the capital of Sindh Province, 20 years ago to start a scrap business, he had continued fulfilling his duty to prepare the shrine for annual pilgrimages – but after he withdrew from it over time upon his conversion, shrine leaders were asking pointed questions about his adherence to Islam.

"I told him [the relative] to get the shrine people off my back, because I did not want to keep any point of contact with my past life," Pauloos, 36, told Compass. "Although shocked, my relative said that he would first try and make my family understand the situation, and then they could figure out a way of letting me walk away peacefully."

Pauloos did not realize that, beyond disowning him, his family would file a police complaint against him because – as a murtad or apostate deserving death – he was said

to have committed "blasphemy." With authorities' help, family members are trying to track him down, he said.

Days before his baptism in September, a Pashtun scrap dealer heard about his conversion. A couple of Christians the dealer and Pauloos knew were sitting at the dealer's shop when they started discussing the United States, whose relations with Pakistan have hit new lows in the past few months.

"The Pashtun man proudly claimed that many Americans were converting to Islam, but he was in for a big surprise when the Christians told him that I, a [formerly] devout Muslim, have been actively participating in church activities and had recently converted," Pauloos said.

The Pashtun trader immediately conveyed the information to Pauloos' family, and he received a call from one of his cousins, an engineer, who asked him to return to Punjab and explain.

"I told him I could not come back because of my business in Karachi, but he kept insisting that I should return to Bhakkar and deny reports that I had converted," Pauloos said. "He then started threatening me that if I didn't return home within three days, they would spread the news and even put the police after me on blasphemy charges. I told him that the threats were meaningless to me. He put down the phone, but before doing so he said that I would be responsible for the consequences."

The next day his father put up a notice in local newspapers disowning him, he said.

"I called my cousin and told him that now that they had disowned me, they should know that I had indeed become a Christian and would not renounce Christ even if they killed me," he said.

Pauloos said that he left his business last month and came to Punjab, where he has been traveling from one city to another sharing his experience of Christ.

Baptized in September after spending more than 10 years learning about the Christian faith, Pauloos said he does not regret trusting in Christ as Savior even though he has lost a comfortable life and a successful business and his Muslim family and friends are in hot pursuit to "kill the apostate."

Family members had begun to grow suspicious when they heard that he was regularly seen in the company of Christian pastors and was avoiding the Islamic shrine and its spiritual head, Baba Raees.

"In fact, Raees had also expressed concern over my lack of interest in the shrine's activities over the years and had asked one of my cousins to investigate why I wasn't taking his calls," Pauloos said. "Fearing that my disclosure would imperil the lives of all Christians connected with me, I told my family that I was keeping contact with the Christians to understand their faith, and that this was merely an education for me. I did not want my family to know that I had lost confidence in Islam and wanted to walk away from the faith of my elders."

In an attempt to dispel the impression that he had become "murtad," he visited the shrine one final time in 2010.

"Raees and other people made repeated attempts to judge whether I was still a Muslim or had renounced my faith, but I gave them the same reason that I had given to my family," he said. "In September this year, I got baptized in Faisalabad. The whole affair was kept a secret because of the security situation in Pakistan."

A relative told him that his family and Muslims associated with the shrine were using their influence to send the police after him, he said.

"They have publicly announced that I would have to pay for my 'crime,' but even death will not deter me from giving up my Christian walk," he said.

When he told his Christian friends of the threats on his life, many suggested that he relocate to another country, he said, but he told them he would neither leave Pakistan nor yield to the demands of hostile Muslims.

"I will serve the Lord in my country even if it means putting my life on the line," he said.

#### Haunted Journey

Stories abound of Muslims coming to Christ through dreams, but Pauloos' journey began with nightmares.

They began haunting him in 2000, and his health deteriorated as he tried all possible remedies. Increasingly going without sleep, his condition worsened as he spent several nights fearing his nightmares might turn into reality. One day he shared his problem with a Christian acquaintance, who suggested that he visit a pastor and request prayer.

"I went to meet the pastor in Karachi and shared my problem with him," he said. "He listened intently and then prayed for me. Before he started praying, he asked me if I had faith that Christ could help me. As Muslims, we hold Jesus Christ in high esteem as a prophet and also believe that He performed miracles. I said yes, and the pastor started praying. As he was praying, I felt as if someone was brushing off the dirt from me ... I started breathing!"

Before he left, the pastor, whose name is withheld for security reasons, shared some verses of the Bible with him.

"He told me things about Christ that I had never heard or read before and said that I could come visit him whenever I needed help," he said, adding that he went to the pastor two or three more times for prayer, and his condition began to improve.

Pauloos said that he did not have any nightmares for a year.

"In 2001, I again started suffering from the dreaded nightmares and shared this with the pastor," he said. "He invited me to his church. It was the first time I had participated in any Christian worship. His congregation welcomed me warmly and gave me immense respect. Then they all prayed for 'their Muslim brother,' and this gesture further attracted me toward Christ."

Increasing contact with the Christians left him "greatly inspired," he said, and when he found himself on a road in Haripur to meet with an uncle who had been in an accident in northwest Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, he felt himself drawn to a small church building, he said.

"As if on cue, my feet started heading towards that direction," he said. "I met the church's pastor and shared with him my experiences in Karachi."

The pastor, whose name is withheld for security reasons, gave him his first Bible, he said, and he attended his church service a few times.

"But then word about this spread in the city, and the pastor requested I stop going there, because it could endanger the lives of Christians living in the area," Pauloos said. "He

apologized for having to ask me to stop, but I told him that I understood the consequences the congregation would have to face and left the city after a few days.”

Back in Karachi, Pauloos said he started reading the Bible regularly and, in order to better understand it, also initiated contacts with other pastors. He recalled one pastor, whose name is withheld for security reasons, who came from the same caste as his.

“He offered a special prayer for me, asking God to guide me as I searched for the truth,” Pauloos said.

He said that in June, he traveled to Iran and Armenia on business, carrying his Bible the whole time.

“In Tehran I strongly felt that the time had come for me to get water baptism and start a new life in Christ,” he said. “I decided that I would take water baptism as soon as I got back.”

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## **Muslims in Pakistan beat, shoot at Christians in land grab**

***Police help cohorts of retired military official in seizure of Christian’s property; two women assaulted***

By Murad Khan

Compass Direct News (01.12.2011) / HRWF (05.12.2011) – <http://www.hrwf.net> – In an attempted land-grab in southern Punjab Province, police and cohorts of a retired military official beat two Christian women and shot at Christians who came to help them on Friday (Nov. 25), area Christians told Compass.

About eight police officials led by Sub-Inspector Muhammad Arif of Kot Sarwar Shaheed police station, along with armed associates of a retired senior military officer, Air Marshal Maqbool Shah, arrived at the fields of Nazeer Masih in the Kot Addu area and ordered the six or seven women working there to leave, said area Christian rights advocate Waseem Shakir. The women included Nazeer’s wife, Martha Bibi, and daughter-in-law, Nasreen Bibi.

The men told the workers that they had come to take possession of the 12.5 acres that Nazeer Masih owns in Mauza Sadiqabad area of Muzaffargarh district, which they claimed had now been allotted by the Revenue Department to the Pakistan Army for distribution among retired officials.

Martha Bibi told Compass the women were still in shock.

“We were cultivating chickpeas when the Muslims arrived at our fields,” she said. “They asked us to leave everything and never return because it was their land now. [We said] we have been cultivating the land since 1976, how could we just leave? This angered them, and they attacked us. They pulled away our headscarves from our heads and started hitting us indiscriminately with clubs and punches.”

About 800 Christians have lived in the Mauza Sadiqabad and Mauza Azizabad areas of Muzaffargarh district for the last 50 years, rights advocate Shakir told Compass by phone.

“The Christians are settled on 10,000 acres of land which they made cultivable over the years,” he said. “The land is actually owned by the government, but the Christians have

been given ownership of the properties, and the record to this effect is present with the local revenue department."

In the last few years Muslims have made several attempts to seize the land from the Christians, usually succeeding because Christians are a marginalized minority, while Muslims carry out illegal activities with impunity and official blessing, Shakir said. A similar attempt to take possession of Nazeer Masih's land was made last year, resulting in a pending case in the Lahore High Court.

This time, Shakir said, the "land mafia" attempting to take the property was led by a senior military official.

"Martha, around 40, and Nasreen, about 28, refused to leave the land, which infuriated the Muslims, and they attacked the women, hitting them with batons and punches," Shakir said. "The Muslims also inflicted a very serious wound near Nasreen's left eye."

He said that on seeing the commotion, some Christians working in nearby fields ran to rescue the two women, but the land-grabbers began shooting at them. No one was injured, and the assailants left with a warning that they would return, Shakir said.

He added that Nazeer's family has been cultivating the land since 1976 and possessed legal documentation recorded with the revenue department.

"It is quite clear that Shah has used his influence and money to illegally get Nazeer's property transferred in his name," Shakir said. "How is it otherwise possible that any person can just come and lay claim on the land, which is already in the possession of someone for the last many years? Everyone is involved in this mafia, which is specifically targeting Christians."

Area Christians had worked hard to make the land cultivable, as it used to be barren before the government settled them there, he said.

"Can the Punjab government justify this methodical injustice against the Christians of this area?" Shakir said. "The Muslims are grabbing any piece of land they can get their hands on. They haven't even spared our graveyards."

Muslim land-grabbers had demolished 150 Christian graves and desecrated holy relics to build shops in the Kot Addu area in November 2010, their efforts fully supported by local government officials (see [www.compassdirect.org](http://www.compassdirect.org), "Pakistani Officials Back Muslim Land-Grabbers, Christians Say," March 9).

Shakir said that five days after the incident and repeated appeals to the Punjab government, officials had taken no action against police for the violence done to the Christian women, much less investigating the attempted land seizure.

"The government doesn't care at all," he said. "Deeply frustrated at the treatment being given to us, we blocked the road for some time in protest. It was then that the area's deputy superintendent of police, Asadullah Khan, assured us that he would request the district police officer to probe the matter himself, because the people involved in this matter were beyond his authority. The assurance is turning out to be eyewash yet again, as there has been no progress in this regard."

Khan declined to comment on the case. He referred Compass to the district police officer, who was unavailable for comment.

Gulzar Masih, headman of the area, told Compass that Muslims had also set fire to the house of a Christian man named Jalal Masih a year ago in an attempt to grab his property.

"We knocked on every possible door, but the local government remained indifferent to the situation," he said. "Even though we somehow managed to get the chief minister to mark our application for registration of a case against the arsonists, the police refused to listen to us and threatened us with dire consequences if we did not stop pursuing the matter. The Muslims eventually grabbed Jalal Masih's property."

Gulzar Masih said that the entire revenue department was involved in tampering with property documents of Christians to render them landless.

"It is economic persecution of Christians of the area," he said. "The government must intervene before it's too late."

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## **Police in Pakistan beat pregnant Christian, husband for 3 days**

***Couple falsely accused of theft abused as marginalized minority in Muslim-majority nation***

By Murad Khan

Compass Direct News (29.11.2011) HRWF (30.11.2011) – <http://www.hrwf.net> – A Christian couple is facing false charges of theft after police in Abbottabad severely beat the pregnant woman and her husband for three days when they refused to confess, they told Compass.

Salma Emmanuel was taken to a hospital in critical condition on Nov. 7, the life of her unborn child also threatened, she said.

In Abbottabad, 50 kilometers (31 miles) northeast of Islamabad in the Hazara region of Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, the 30-year-old Emmanuel and her husband, Emmanuel Rasheed, a 39-year-old TV repairman, said that they were inexplicably arrested after the Muslim woman who employed Emmanuel as a maid had allowed the Christian woman to temporarily store some of her jewelry at her employer's house.

Emmanuel told Compass by phone that police arrested them on Nov. 5, keeping her at the Women's Police Station for interrogation and her husband at the City Police Station – where they told Rasheed he would be released, he said, if he renounced Christ and became a Muslim.

Emmanuel said that upon reaching the police station, an inspector identified only as Nazia and two other policewomen started punching and kicking her and striking her with batons, demanding that she "confess her crime."

"I begged them for mercy, pleading that I am five months pregnant, but they continued their merciless onslaught for over three hours," she said. "They continued to try to force me to admit to the crime, even threatening that they would kill my baby, but I refused to confess a false allegation."

She said that after three days, when she was "on the verge of dying," police called her brother-in-law to the station and told him to take her to a hospital.

"I had complete faith in Jesus and trusted that He would rescue me and Emmanuel from this great problem," she said. "It was our faith that kept us going ...this was the first time either of us had ever encountered the police, let aside being charged in any case, so you can imagine what we underwent."

Emmanuel was treated at Benazir Shaheed Hospital, where doctors began efforts to save her and the fetus.

Although the doctor on duty confirmed that her body bore marks of severe violence, Deputy Superintendent of Police Aziz Afridi denied that police had tortured her. After reports of the violence reached local media, however, the deputy inspector general of Haraza Division, Dr. Naeem Khan, ordered an investigation.

As Emmanuel was fighting for her life at the hospital, Rasheed was undergoing a similar treatment at the City Police Station.

"The police beat me up mercilessly," he said. "They kept on asking me to confess to the burglary, but I did not submit to their pressure. It was Eid al-Adha [Muslim Festival of Sacrifice, a three-day public holiday in Pakistan] on Nov. 7, and their torture continued during those days."

Rasheed said police tried to convert him to Islam while he was in custody.

"A policeman offered to remove the theft charges against me if I was willing to renounce Christianity and convert to Islam," he said. "I told him that no matter what happens, I will not renounce my faith, nor would I confess the false charges made against us."

Emmanuel said she started working as a maid at the home of Ghazala Riaz around a year ago. She was one of four servants who returned to their homes each day after finishing their tasks. On Oct. 30, she said, she had gone to a jeweler to get her gold ornaments (about 100 grams) polished in preparation for her brother's wedding when Riaz phoned her in need of some work at the house.

"I went straight to madam's home, and before starting my work, I asked her to keep my jewelry in her cupboard for safety, and that I would take it home the next day," Emmanuel said. "Madam put the jewelry in her locker, and I returned home after ending my chores, without even the slightest idea of what was going to happen next."

Emmanuel said that at about midnight, Riaz called her and told her that there had been a burglary at the house, with 900,000 rupees (US\$10,095), 300 grams of gold ornaments, including Emmanuel's jewelry, and a laptop missing.

The Christian couple rushed to Riaz's house, where police had already arrived.

"Madam told the police that my ornaments were also among those taken by the burglars. The police recorded my statement and also asked questions of my husband," she said.

The couple has three children – the oldest 12, the youngest 5 – so one of the parents stays home with them when the other goes to work, Rasheed said.

"The police allowed us to go home after three or four hours, but in the afternoon they raided our house and took both of us into custody on an informal report," Rasheed said, adding that police told them that the Muslim family suspected that they were involved in the burglary.

"My wife and I protested at this false allegation and asked the police to consider the fact that we had also suffered a great loss, but they wouldn't listen to us," he said.

Police released them on the evening of Nov. 1 after trying various tactics to get a favorable statement, Rasheed said.

"In the meantime, the police obtained a search warrant of our house and combed through our belongings, but they could not find anything from our home," he said.

On Nov. 5, under pressure from an army colonel related to the Muslim family, police again picked up the couple from their home, they said. The three days of beatings followed.

"We may be poor, but our poverty has never shaken our faith in God," Rasheed said. "He has always provided for our needs, and I knew He would release us from this misery because we are innocent."

He happily told how police were unable to find any evidence against the couple, leading to his release from jail on bail on Nov. 17. His wife's bail hearing has been set for Dec. 8.

The burglary charges are not the only test of the couple's faith. Emmanuel, who was also working as a child-minder in a local school besides working as domestic help, has lost both her jobs. When Rasheed was jailed, his employer immediately found a replacement.

"I used to earn about 7,000 rupees (US\$80) per month, while Salma used to earn around 5,000 rupees (US\$56) per month," he said. "At the moment both of us are jobless and are being looked after by our relatives ... They are the ones who pooled money to hire us a lawyer, otherwise it would have been difficult for us to fight this case."

As Emmanuel heals, she said her heart goes out to those wrongly accused of crimes.

"Madam and her family did not name any of their Muslim servants in the investigation, but we stand vindicated after the police could not find any evidence against us," she said. "Even though I've lost my gold ornaments, which I had saved for my daughter, I have faith that God will compensate for our loss."

Christian rights advocate Napoleon Qayyum told Compass this was not the first incident in which a Christian maid has been illegally detained and tortured in Pakistan, which is more than 95 percent Muslim. Last year in April, a 14-year-old Christian maid, Sumera Pervaiz, was illegally detained and tortured by an air force officer in Islamabad, he said. No action was taken against the family, he added, because of their influential status.

"I wrote a letter to the chief justice of Pakistan's Supreme Court, which was also published in the press, requesting him to take notice of the sad incident, but there has been no response from the country's apex court," Qayyum said. "It seems that, like other government institutions, the judiciary is also ignoring the rights of minorities."

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## **Evangelist shot dead in Pakistan**

***Christian who wanted to serve the poor had received threats from area Muslims***

By Murad Khan

Compass Direct News (18.11.2011) / HRWF (21.11.2011) – <http://www.hrwf.net> - An evangelist was shot dead here on Wednesday (Nov. 16) by an unidentified gunman in what his family believes was a radical Muslim group's targeting of a Christian.



Zahid Jameel, 25, told Compass that his father, Jameel Saawan, and a helper were opening the doors of their cosmetics shop in the Gulshan-e-Iqbal area of Pakistan's commercial hub of Karachi on Wednesday morning when a young man appeared and shot his father, first in the neck and then in the face.

The assassin fled on a motorcycle on which two people were waiting, keeping watch for him, Jameel said.

"We firmly believe that my father was killed because of his preaching of the Bible, because there is no other reason," Jameel said.

His father had not spoken of any threats on his life in recent weeks, though he had received threats after voicing his desire to start a welfare organization for poor Christians in the Essanagri area of Karachi two years ago, Jameel said.

"That could not materialize after he started receiving threats from some unknown forces," Jameel said. "We do not know who threatened him, but my mother persuaded him not to put his life in danger, for our sake."

Nevertheless, Jameel said that his father continued to preach and was widely respected for being a vocal supporter of the Christian community.

"We live in a rented apartment and our shops are also on lease – we don't have any property, and no enemies, which is why we are shocked by our father's killing," he said. "It wasn't a robbery, because the assassin only walked towards my father and shot at him."

Zahid said that his mother was in a state of shock, as were his three sisters and older brother, Shahid.

"Our father has been gunned down for no reason at all," Jameel said. "He used to share the Word with Muslims, but I have never heard that he entered into an argument with any person."

Jameel said that the family had moved to Karachi from Quetta about 10 years ago, with his father starting the cosmetics business two years later.

"My father was a very religious man, and some years ago he decided that it was time for him to reach out to the people and share the Good News with them," he said. "Every day he would visit several families to share the Word of God and was very content with his life."

His father used to sit with him at his shop from 11 a.m. until 3 p.m., then go off to visit Christian families to share the Bible, Jameel said. On the day of the murder, however, his father reached the shop 15 minutes ahead of him.

"The young boy who helps me in my shop told us that he was opening the locks of the other door when he heard a gunshot," he said. "The boy then saw my father trying to grasp the assailant, but the man fired another bullet that hit my father in the cheek and exited from the back of his head, killing him instantly."

Michael Javed, a former member of the Sindh provincial assembly, told Compass that he had known the victim for several years, as both of them are from Quetta.

"Saawan was a very good man and was always eager to help his community," Javed said. "I also think that he was killed by some religious forces, because he had shared with me once that he was receiving threats from some quarters."

The former legislator said that no one had come forward to record statements with the police because of fears for their security, and it was highly unlikely that Saawan's killers would be caught.

"There used to be quite a few cases of such nature in Sindh, but now the situation for minorities is worsening," he said. "The government needs to make efforts to provide security to our people."

Napoleon Qayyum of the Pakistan People's Party Minorities Wing told Compass that the PPP-led Sindh government would make all possible efforts to apprehend Saawan's killers.

"President Asif Zardari's spokesman has told me that the president had tasked Sindh Home Minister Manzoor Wassan to investigate the incident and report back to him," he said, adding that Wassan was likely to visit the family today.

Sharing Life Ministry's Sohail Johnson said he regretted that the killing of the evangelist would instill further fear in Christians in the city.

"Pastor Saawan's brutal murder shows that the forces of extremism and intolerance will go to any extent to disrupt peace and harmony in Pakistan," he said.

Although police registered the case on Wednesday (Nov. 16), they have yet to make any progress in the investigation, sources said.

Saawan's family was preparing for his burial today, still holding onto some hope that one day his killers will be brought to justice.

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## **US commission: Pakistan schools teach Hindu hatred**

AP (09.11.2011) / HRWF (17.11.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - Text books in Pakistani schools foster prejudice and intolerance of Hindus and other religious minorities, while most teachers view non-Muslims as "enemies of Islam," according to a study by a U.S. government commission released Wednesday.

The findings indicate how deeply ingrained hardline Islam is in Pakistan and help explain why militancy is often supported, tolerated or excused in the country.

"Teaching discrimination increases the likelihood that violent religious extremism in Pakistan will continue to grow, weakening religious freedom, national and regional stability, and global security," said Leonard Leo, the chairman of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom.

Pakistan was created in 1947 as a homeland for the Muslims of South Asia and was initially envisaged as a moderate state where minorities would have full rights. But three wars with mostly Hindu India; state support for militants fighting Soviet-rule in Afghanistan in the 1980s; and the appeasement of hardline clerics by weak governments seeking legitimacy have led to a steady radicalization of society.

Religious minorities and those brave enough to speak out against intolerance have often been killed, seemingly with impunity, by militant sympathizers. The commission warned that any significant efforts to combat religious discrimination, especially in education, would "likely face strong opposition" from hardliners.

The study reviewed more than 100 textbooks from grades 1-10 from Pakistan's four provinces. Researchers in February this year visited 37 public schools, interviewing 277 students and teachers, and 19 madrases, where they interviewed 226 students and teachers.

The Islamization of textbooks began under the U.S.-backed rule of army dictator Gen. Zia-ul-Haq, who courted Islamists to support his rule. In 2006, the government announced plans to reform the curriculum to address the problematic content, but that has not been done, the study said.

Pakistan's Islamist and right-wing polity would likely oppose any efforts to change the curriculum, and the government has shown no desire to challenge them on the issue.

The report found systematic negative portrayals of minorities, especially Hindus and, to a lesser extent, Christians. Hindus make up more than 1 percent of Pakistan's 180 million people, while Christians represent around 2 percent. Some estimates put the numbers higher.

There are also even smaller populations of Sikhs and Buddhists.

"Religious minorities are often portrayed as inferior or second-class citizens who have been granted limited rights and privileges by generous Pakistani Muslims, for which they should be grateful," the report said. "Hindus are repeatedly described as extremists and eternal enemies of Islam whose culture and society is based on injustice and cruelty, while Islam delivers a message of peace and brotherhood, concepts portrayed as alien to the Hindu."

The books don't contain many specific references to Christians, but those that "that do exist seem generally negative, painting an incomplete picture of the largest religious minority in Pakistan," the report said.

Attempts to reach Pakistan's education minister were not successful.

The textbooks make very little reference to the role played by Hindus, Sikhs and Christians in the cultural, military and civic life of Pakistan, meaning a "a young minority student will thus not find many examples of educated religious minorities in their own textbooks," the report said.

"In most cases historic revisionism seems designed to exonerate or glorify Islamic civilization, or to denigrate the civilizations of religious minorities," the report said. "Basic changes to the texts would be needed to present a history free of false or unsubstantiated claims which convey religious bias."

The researchers also found that the books foster a sense that Pakistan's Islamic identity is under constant threat.

"The anti-Islamic forces are always trying to finish the Islamic domination of the world," read one passage from a social studies text being taught to Grade 4 students in Punjab province, the country's most populated. "This can cause danger for the very existence of Islam. Today, the defense of Pakistan and Islam is very much in need."

The report states that Islamic teachings and references were commonplace in compulsory text books, not just religious ones, meaning Pakistan's Christians, Hindus and other minorities were being taught Islamic content. It said this appeared to violate Pakistan's constitution, which states that students should not have to receive instruction in a religion other than their own.

The attitudes of the teachers no doubt reflect the general intolerance in Pakistan — a 2011 Pew Research Center study found the country the third most intolerant in the world — but because of the influence they have, they are especially worrisome.

Their views were frequently nuanced and sometimes contradictory, according to the study. While many advocated respectful treatment of religious minorities, this was conditional upon the attitudes of the minorities, "which appeared to be in question," the report said. The desire to proselytize was cited as one of the main motivations for kind treatment.

According to the study, more than half the public school teachers acknowledged the citizenship of religious minorities, but a majority expressed the opinion that religious minorities must not be allowed to hold positions of power, in order to protect Pakistan and Muslims. While many expressed the importance of respecting the practices of religious minorities, simultaneously 80 percent of teachers viewed non-Muslims, in some form or another, as "enemies of Islam."

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## **Pakistani mother condemned for 'blasphemy' allegedly beaten**

***Christian woman, husband apparently pressured into denying incident***

By Murad Khan

Compass Direct News (20.10.2011) HRWF (25.10.2011) – <http://www.hrwf.net> – A female prison officer assigned to provide security for a Christian mother of five who was sentenced to death on "blasphemy" charges beat her earlier this month, sources said.

Sources in Pakistan's Sheikhpura District Jail said Asia Noreen, also known as Asia Bibi, was beaten on Oct. 5 by a prison officer identified only as Khadeeja, allegedly because of the Muslim officer's anti-Christian bias, while other staff members deployed for her security looked on in silence.

Noreen, mother of two children and stepmother to three others, was sentenced to death last November after her conviction for blaspheming Islam's prophet, Muhammad, after a verbal disagreement with some women in the village of Ittanwali, near Lahore.

The prison sources said Deputy Superintendent of Sheikhpura Jail Ghafoor Anjum did not initially take any action against Khadeeja for attacking Noreen – who is being kept in a special high-security cell due to serious threats on her life – despite learning about the incident immediately after it took place.

Khadeeja was later suspended for three months, and jail Superintendent Sheikh Khalid began an inquiry of her actions after an intelligence agency reported the matter to the Punjab Province government. The Home Department also sent a senior police official to Sheikhpura to investigate, and he recommended Khadeeja's immediate removal from service, sources said.

Based on communications with jail staff members, a source told Compass on condition of anonymity that Noreen had not received any life-threatening injuries, but that jail personnel had apparently pressured the Christian woman and her husband to refrain from telling anyone about the incident. He said that although it was confirmed that Noreen had been beaten, prison officials have apparently pressured her and her husband, Ashiq Masih, to say only that the female prison officer got angry with Noreen over a

trivial matter and that jail staff intervened in time before she could attack her; otherwise, Masih could lose his visitation rights.

"It seems that Ashiq has been pressured by the jail authorities to say that Khadeeja did not attack Asia," the source said. "Why would the jail superintendent suspend Khadeeja for three months, and why would the inquiry officer recommend her removal from service, if she just 'got angry with Asia' over a minor issue?"

The source said that two false versions of the incident were circulating in the jail. Some staff members claimed that Khadeeja had asked Noreen to let her use the cell washroom and beat her when she refused, while others said that the guard had objected to the presence of some "prohibited articles" in Noreen's possession and thrashed her when she refused to give them up.

"Both versions of the incident are absurd," the source said. "Why did Khadeeja want to use the prisoner's washroom when she could have gone to the staff restrooms? Asia's the prisoner, not Khadeeja. Could anyone also explain how Asia managed to sneak in 'prohibited items' in her cell, and only Khadeeja objected to it?"

He added that the beating clearly showed the anti-Christian motive of the prison officer.

"The jail authorities are trying their best to hush up the matter as soon as possible, as it is a big embarrassment to the government," he said.

The source said the attack reminded him that former Punjab Gov. Salmaan Taseer, who along with Federal Minister for Minorities Shahbaz Bhatti was rallying for Noreen's release, was killed by his own security guard. Bhatti also was later slain for defending Noreen and opposing the blasphemy laws.

"There should be a more thorough vetting of people being assigned security duties," he said, adding that the staff members who witnessed the beating yet kept silent should also be suspended.

While reluctant to admit that the Muslim prison officer had beaten Noreen, a jail official acknowledged that Noreen had struck back in self-defense. Though adamant that Noreen was safe in custody, he said the incident had negatively affected her security and authorities were considering transferring her to another prison.

"It was an unfortunate incident, as we had been keeping Asia's location secret for the last many months, but this episode has blown our cover," a senior jail officer requesting anonymity told Compass. "We made the best possible arrangements for her security. She is kept in a separate cell with a closed circuit camera to monitor her security round-the-clock. More than 10 wardens have been especially deployed around her barrack. She has been strictly forbidden from eating anything offered by any unauthorized personnel. Asia is safe in our custody, and all possible efforts will be made to ensure her security."

Conviction under Section 295-C of the blasphemy law for derogatory comments about Muhammad is punishable by death, though life imprisonment is also possible. Section 295-B makes willful desecration of the Quran or use of an extract in a derogatory manner punishable with life imprisonment. Section 295-A prohibits injuring or defiling places of worship and "acts intended to outrage religious feelings." It is punishable by life imprisonment, which in Pakistan is 25 years.

Mumtaz Qadri, the security guard who murdered Taseer for his defense of Noreen and efforts to revise the blasphemy laws, was sentenced to death this month. After protests by Muslims in the street as well as by high-level Islamists, however, the judge who sentenced Qadri, Pervez Ali Shah, was removed from his post by the Lahore High Court.

The Rawalpindi Bar Association had threatened a nationwide strike if Shah was not suspended or transferred within five days.

The Islamabad High Court has agreed to consider Qadri's appeal of his verdict, thus suspending his death sentence until a ruling is made.

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## **Pakistani Muslims fire on Christians in land-grab, killing one**

***Heavily-armed assailants fire indiscriminately, injuring 21 others, six critically***

By Murad Khan

Compass Direct News (07.10.2011) / HRWF (13.10.2011) – <http://www.hrwf.net> – Muslims in Pakistan's Mian Channu area in southern Punjab Province shot dead an unarmed Christian man and injured 21 others, six of them critically, in an attempted land-grab on Wednesday (Oct. 5).

Residents of the area told Compass by phone that 40 to 45 heavily-armed Muslims on 10 to 12 motorcycles, two tractor-trolleys and in a car reached Chak 134-16/L village, in Khanewal district, and forcibly entered the home of Adeel Kashif, a Christian carpenter who was living on a government-owned piece of land.

"The attackers forced their way into Kashif's house and started throwing the family's belongings onto the street," Wazir Masih, a Christian elder in the area, told Compass. "They also tore the clothes off Kashif's three female family members – Violet, 40, Parveen, 35, and Esther, 17, and tortured the family."

Masih said the assailants wanted to take illegal possession of the 18-marla piece of land (in Pakistan, one marla equals 30.25 square yards).

"Since pre-partition days, a piece of government land is given to Kammiss [laborers or craftsmen] for residence, and in return they help the villagers in whatever way they can," Masih said. "This allotment is made with the complete consensus of the villagers."

Before Kashif, a Muslim carpenter named Muhammad Iqbal was allowed to live on the property, he said.

"Iqbal lived there for over 10 years and moved out about two months ago," Masih said. "However, before leaving he prepared fake papers of the land in connivance with the Patwari [local revenue officer] and a local Muslim group and 'sold' it to them for 130,000 rupees [US\$1,480]," Masih said, adding that the entire process was fraudulent because no one can sell the government's land in a personal capacity.

He said that on Wednesday (Oct. 5), armed Muslims led by men of the area's powerful Jagrane family arrived at the house and tried to force the Christians out.

"Kashif's neighbors and some other villagers came out of their homes on hearing the commotion," Masih said. "The village comprises about 250 Christian families, and some 90 to 100 people gathered there and tried to persuade the Muslims not to dislodge the Christian carpenter illegally. None of the Christians present there was carrying any weapon, as no one was expecting such a harsh action by the Muslims."

Masih said the Muslims suddenly opened indiscriminate fire on the Christians, instantly killing 25-year-old Sajid Bashir Masih and seriously injuring 21 others, including women and children. He added that six of the injured were in critical condition, one of them Sajid Bashir Masih's younger brother, Haroon.

"The Christians had done nothing to provoke the Muslims into employing such brute force," Wazir Masih said. "They just opened fire on the defenseless people with their automatic rifles and shotguns."

Masih said that as soon as Sajid Bashir Masih succumbed to his injuries, some of the assailants fled the scene while others took refuge inside Kashif's house and started shooting at the villagers. He said the villagers immediately informed police, who arrived soon from a nearby station.

Police besieged the house and eventually managed to arrest 16 armed assailants, but the primary suspects remain free.

A First Information Report was registered against the attackers in Mian Channu's Saddar Police Station by the deceased's father, Bashir Masih, early yesterday (FIR No. 432 under sections 302, 324, 448, 511, 452, 148 and 149 of the Pakistan Penal Code).

Some of the injured Christians have been transferred to the District Headquarters Hospital, while those with serious bullet wounds have been admitted to the Nishtar Hospital in Multan.

A.D. Sahil, a Christian schoolteacher of the area, told Compass that the Christians suspected police complicity in the incident.

"The police station is just a couple of kilometers away, yet such a large group of heavily-armed Muslims managed to reach our village in broad daylight," he said, adding that there was tension between the two communities since the killing, and police have been deployed in the village. "The district police chief and the district's administrative head reached the village soon after the incident and held negotiations with us."

He added that, in view of the history of bitter inter-religious relations in the area, government officials have given assurances of protection to local Christians. The village is near Shantinagar, a Christian village attacked by thousands of Islamist extremists on Feb. 6, 1997.

The Muslims burned down 785 houses and four churches, and more than 2,500 Christians had to flee following allegations that a Christian villager had blasphemed against the Muslim prophet, Muhammad.

Christians make up only 2.45 percent of Pakistan's population, which is more than 95 percent Muslim, according to Operation World.

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## **Progress in Pakistani rape case, but alleged victim's father dies**

***One suspect arrested, bail of another cancelled after intervention by rights group***

By Murad Khan

Compass Direct News (04.10.2011) / HRWF (05.10.2011) – <http://www.hrwf.net> – A Christian mother of five who was allegedly raped by two Muslims rejoiced after police in

Pakistan's Kasur district arrested a suspect and suspended an officer who had dismissed her complaints, but her solace was short-lived when her father collapsed and died Friday night (Sept. 30) after learning of her ordeal.

The 32-year-old woman and her husband, municipal worker Mushtaq Masih, told Compass by phone that they had lost hope of getting justice as they were facing threats from area Muslims to withdraw the case even as police were deliberately slow to investigate and arrest the accused.

Heartened after advocate pressure led to the arrest last week of one of the primary suspects in the case, the woman, whose name is withheld, went to visit her father late Friday night (Sept. 30). Up to that point she had not been able to bear informing her siblings and 70-year-old father, Gama Masih, about being raped on Sept. 15, but the family felt it was unwise to refrain further.

"As soon as my wife shared her ordeal with her family, her father collapsed and died on the spot," Mushtaq Masih said. "He could not take the pain. My wife is in a state of shock. She lost her honor, and now she has lost her father. We have suffered a lot in the last 15 days."

The woman said she was returning home to Mustafabad, in Punjab Province's Kasur district, when two Muslims along with an unidentified accomplice abducted her at gunpoint, took her to an abandoned house in the area and raped her. Muslim criminals in Pakistan, where the population is more than 95 percent Muslim according to Operation World, tend to assume they will not be prosecuted if their victims are Christians.

The couple said that soon after their plight received media attention, representatives of the Community Development Initiative (CDI), a non-government Christian organization affiliated with the European Centre for Law and Justice, offered them legal aid.

"This was a great blessing for us," Masih said. "We are poor people and were under great pressure to withdraw the charges. The families of the accused men and other Muslims were pressuring us to withdraw the case. Some offered us money in exchange, others threatened harm to our family if we did not concede to their demand."

Police had initially arrested a suspect identified only as Shera, 27, but the woman declined to identify him as the assailant because she and her husband had been threatened with death by Muslims at the police station, who also threatened to rape their daughters. The couple said the Muslims told them they should not forget that they were chooras or "sweepers," a derogatory word for Christians in Pakistan.

Masih said that CDI lawyer Niaz Aamer helped to jump-start an effort to arrest Shera and the other suspect, identified only as 23-year-old Pahlu (previously identified as Bhallu). CDI Executive Director Asif Aqeel told Compass his team accompanied the victim and her husband to the office of District Police Officer (DPO) Syed Khurram Ali Shah and complained about the prejudice of Investigating Officer Muhammad Sharif, who had dismissed the Christians' accusations that police had sought money in exchange for dropping the case and refused to acknowledge that Muslims were threatening the woman's family and needed police protection.

"The DPO took strong notice of the investigating officer's behavior and suspended him immediately," Aqeel said.

The woman told the DPO how the suspects and other Muslims had intimidated her into declining to identify Shera, and Shah ordered his subordinates to bring Shera to his office so she could identify him again, Aqeel said.



"Shera was produced before the DPO and was handcuffed soon after the woman pointed him out as one of her two rapists," Aqeel said.

He added that Aamer also filed a court petition for the cancellation of bail for Pahlu, which was granted. Police have since begun making raids to arrest the other suspects.

The families of the accused had offered some US\$2,500 to the woman's family in exchange for dropping the charges, Aqeel said, and the suspects' lawyers also approached Aamer in court and offered him US\$500 to "misguide and abandon" the Christian family.

The two Muslim lawyers told Aamer he was pursuing the case of "low-born laborers," Aqeel said. They told the CDI lawyer, "It's not a big deal if our boys had some fun. Let's just finish the case and you also get to keep your fee," Aqeel said, adding that Aamer rejected their offer.

Shera's arrest and the cancellation of Pahlu's bail sent a wave of jubilation through the Christian community of the Laliani area of Mustafabad, as the Christians were not accustomed to such victories.

"Malik Faraz, the pastor of the United Presbyterian Church of the area, telephoned me to share the jubilation of his people," Aqeel said, praising the DPO for providing justice to the Christian family.

Before the death of her father, the woman on Friday afternoon expressed satisfaction on developments to Compass and said "her faith in God had strengthened."

"I used to weep in my heart all the time, ever since the incident took place," she said. "I didn't have any hope, but my Lord has not forsaken me."

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## **Christian girl, family in Pakistan expelled over misspelling**

### ***Wild accusation of 'blasphemy' forces eighth-grader's family to relocate***

By Murad Khan

Compass Direct News (28.09.2011) / HRWF (29.09.2011) – <http://www.hrwf.net> – An eighth-grade student in Pakistan has been expelled from school and her family forced to relocate after the Christian girl misspelled an Urdu word, leading to accusations of "blasphemy," sources said.

In the garrison city of Abbottabad, 13-year-old Faryal Bhatti, a student at the Sir Syed Girls High School in Pakistan Ordnance Factories (POF) Colony Havelian, misspelled a word on an Urdu exam on Thursday (Sept. 22) while answering a question on a poem in praise of the Muslim prophet Muhammad, according to area Christians.

Faryal wrote laanat, the transliteration of the Urdu word for "curse," instead of naat, which means a poem written in praise of Islam's prophet, they said. The school administration and local Islamists declared that the error was serious enough to violate Pakistan's widely condemned laws against blaspheming Muhammad and Islam.

Conviction under Section 295-C of Pakistan's blasphemy law for derogatory comments about Muhammad is punishable by death, though life imprisonment is also possible.

Faryal's Urdu teacher was collecting the answer sheets from her students when she noticed the word on Faryal's paper. The teacher, identified only as Fareeda, summoned the Christian girl, scolded her and beat her, area sources told Compass by telephone.

Fareeda then notified the principal, who in turn informed school officials as news of the error spread throughout the colony. The next day, male students at the school as well as some Muslim representatives staged a demonstration, demanding registration of a criminal case against the eighth-grader and her eviction from the area, sources said.

Prayer leaders within the Muslim community also condemned the incident in their Friday sermons, asking the colony's administration to take action against Faryal as well as her family, sources said.

POF Colony Havelian Managing Director Asif Siddiki called a meeting of clerics and school teachers to discuss the conflict, according to reports, at which the girl and her mother were ordered to appear; they explained that it was a mere error caused by a resemblance between the two words.

The girl and her mother immediately apologized, contending that Faryal had no malicious intentions, but in a move apparently designed to pacify Muslim cries for punishment, the POF administration expelled her from the school on Saturday (Sept. 24).

School administrator Junaid Sarfraz said Faryal had confessed that she had inadvertently made the mistake and the school administration, after consulting local clerics, decided to expel her. Sarfraz claimed that Faryal's teacher was certain that she had made the mistake intentionally and that the matter was referred to clerics because Faryal had previously aroused similar suspicions of blasphemy.

Maulana Alla Dita, head of the area's prominent mosque, reportedly said the school administration had made the right decision in expelling Faryal from school. Dita claimed that he had met with Faryal, who had apologized for the mistaken use of the word. Dita said he wasn't clear about Faryal's intentions, but that "the word she had used was sacrilegious," according to press reports.

Faryal's mother, Sarafeen Bhatti, a staff nurse at the POF Hospital Havelian for several years, was immediately transferred to POF Wah Cantonment Hospital. Abbottabad District Commissioner Syed Imtiaz Hussain Shah said the 13-year-old had been expelled for using "derogatory words" and her mother had consequently been "moved to another place."

A Christian lawyer in Havelian who was among the community members making efforts to defuse area tensions told Compass by phone that the military had acted swiftly to save the lives of Faryal and her mother.

"The military swung into action soon after protests broke out calling for a blasphemy case against the teenager," said the attorney on condition of anonymity. "They bundled the family in an ambulance and took them away before the situation could turn violent."

A text-message campaign also started on Saturday (Sept. 24) calling for action against the family, he said.

"Some Christian families living in the area panicked, but the situation has been under control so far," he said.

An area Christian told Compass there were 13 or 14 Christian families in the colony who now have fears about security. He said that Faryal's family had little contact with other

Christians living in the area. The resident also praised the army for acting timely, "or else the mullahs would have punished all of us for the little girl's error."

The incident has instilled fear in Christian parents that an unintentional mistake by their children could cause them personal disaster. Shazia Imran, mother to three schoolchildren, told Compass that Faryal's episode had left her distressed.

"Ever since I came to know about the young girl's story, I have been unable to sleep properly," she said. "We have been continuously telling our children not to discuss their faith with anyone in school and to avoid getting into religious discussions with their Muslim class fellows, but this was beyond my imagination."

She added that she and her husband were now "very disturbed and fearful" about their children's future in Pakistan.

Azra George, a Christian mother to a college student, said the incident had shocked her and the congregation at her Presbyterian church.

"Everyone at church was discussing this sorry incident on Sunday," she said. "Parents of school-going children were particularly perturbed. This blasphemy thing will always remain hanging on our heads like a sword, and there's nothing anyone can do about it."

Compass's repeated attempts to reach the Bhatti family were unsuccessful as they had moved to an undisclosed location due to security concerns.

Asif Aqeel, executive director of the Community Development Initiative, an affiliate of the European Centre for Law and Justice, said the incident showed how Pakistani society was getting sensitized over the issue of blasphemy.

"Only a small number of people are formally accused of blasphemy – we do not know the number of people who, like Faryal and her family, are harassed without a legal charge," he said. "Members of Pakistan's minority communities are afraid of moving around and expressing themselves freely due to the fear of being accused of blasphemy."

Christians make up only 2.45 percent of Pakistan's population, which is more than 95 percent Muslim, according to Operation World. Section 295-B of Pakistan's blasphemy law makes willful desecration of the Quran or use of an extract in a derogatory manner punishable with life imprisonment. Section 295-A prohibits injuring or defiling places of worship and "acts intended to outrage religious feelings." It is punishable by life imprisonment, which in Pakistan is 25 years.

Aqeel said a Christian boy was recently implicated in a criminal case of harassment by the family of a Muslim girl who was in love with him. Aqeel said the boy's family urged the police investigating officer to free the boy, whose name was withheld for security reasons, as the charges were baseless.

"The family was taken aback when the police official told them that their son had mocked the Sunnah [sayings and teachings] of prophet Muhammad by keeping a French beard," Aqeel said. Thus, although the harassment case had nothing to do with the blasphemy law, the mere mention of the law forced the family to keep silent, he said.

Similarly, Christian teachers avoid lessons that mention Islamic history or anything related to the religion out of fear that any misstep could bring criminal charges. Likewise, Urdu language and social studies textbooks include several lessons on Islamic religious thought, so Christian teachers avoid nearly half of these books to avoid being charged with blasphemy, he said.

Napolean Qayyum, a leader of the Minorities Wing of the ruling Pakistan People's Party, condemned the incident, saying it was unfortunate that a 13-year-old had to suffer this ordeal over a miniscule error.

"The army's timely intervention saved the Christians' lives, but most people are not so fortunate," he said, adding that the incident showed how intolerance towards minorities was taking root in Pakistani society.

"Would the teacher have highlighted the same mistake if it was made by a Muslim student?" he said. "I would guess not."

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## **Christian mother of five in Pakistan alleges rape**

***Islamists threaten family, police offer money to drop charges, she says***

By Murad Khan

Compass Direct News (21.09.2011) / HRWF (29.09.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - A Christian mother of five was allegedly raped by two Muslim men last week, and area Islamists are threatening to harm her family if charges against the suspects are not dropped, the woman and her husband told Compass.

On Thursday (Sept. 15), the 32-year-old woman said, she was returning home to Mustafabad, in Punjab Province's Kasur district, from a garment factory where she works. Two Muslims, identified only as 23-year-old Bhallu and 27-year-old Shera, along with an unidentified accomplice, allegedly abducted her at gunpoint, took her to an abandoned house in the area and raped her, she said.

Working late, she had reached the Mustafabad bus stop at 11:45 p.m. and had begun walking to her home five minutes away; the street was deserted, said the alleged victim, whose name is withheld.

"As soon as I entered our street, Bhallu appeared from the shadows and put his hand on my mouth," she told Compass by phone. "A second person, who I later recognized as Bhallu's friend Shera, came from behind and put a pistol on my temple. A third person also appeared on the scene, and together they first gagged me and then forcibly took me to an abandoned house. I tried my best to get free from their hold and save myself, but they were too powerful for me."

Once inside, she said, they took off her gag, and she pleaded with them to leave her alone.

"I tried screaming, but they hit me," she said, sobbing. "Not for a minute did they acknowledge that I was a mother to five children. Then they raped me, one after the other. Their third accomplice stood guard as they tore in on me like animals."

She said that her tormentors let her go after more than an hour.

"They had torn my clothes, and I could barely step outside the house," she said. "I don't know how I managed to reach my home ... Words fail me even now."

Muslim criminals in Pakistan, where the population is more than 95 percent Muslim according to Operation World, tend to assume they will not be prosecuted if their victims are Christians. The accuser said Muslim men in the area have been harassing Christian women for some time.

"There are around 500 Christian houses in this area, which is predominantly inhabited by Muslims," she said. "There have been several instances when they have publicly harassed us but have gotten away with it, because we keep silent to avoid a clash."

A month ago, as she was returning home from work, she was near her house when she suddenly felt someone pulling her head scarf, she said. She turned and found one of Bhallu's friends holding the head scarf.

"I started screaming, and my husband and a neighbor rushed out, but the boy walked away as if nothing had happened," she said. "We did not say a word about this to anyone out of shame and fear of the Muslims."

She said that after that incident, her husband, who works as a sweeper, began accompanying her to and from the bus stop.

"But there were days when he could not accompany me to the bus stop, and I used to walk alone," she said.

Her husband, Mushtaq Masih, said that he was speechless after she told him about the ordeal.

"We have five children – three boys and two girls – with the oldest daughter studying in sixth grade – I cannot express the thoughts that filled my mind at that time," Masih said. "The Muslims had ruined us completely, and I did not know what would happen to us if we reported the crime, but seeing my wife devastated, I decided to face the rapists."

He called police, who visited the crime scene and took the woman to the hospital for a medical examination that proved she had been gang-raped, he said. Police filed a First Information Report (FIR No. 491/11) against Bhallu and his accomplices.

The woman said that she knew Bhallu only because he lived in her neighborhood, and that although she recognized Shera, she did not know his name until the FIR was filed.

Masih said that Shera's name came up during the initial police investigation, and he was in custody when the investigating officer asked Masih to bring his wife to the police station to identify the suspects. Bhallu had fled the area.

His wife said that as they reached the police station, Muslims warned the family against pointing out Shera.

"They told us that they will kill my children and husband if I identify Shera," she said. "They said that we should not forget that we are chooras [sweepers, a derogatory word for Christians] and can bring no harm to them. They also warned that our daughters would face a similar fate if we did not listen to them."

She refused to identify Shera and returned home, she said.

"What happened to me should not happen to any of them," she said. "My children are my world, how could I put their lives in danger? ... Please pray that no woman suffers what I have been through."

#### Pressure to Drop Charges

Area Christians were shocked. The family continues to receive threats to withdraw the case against the primary suspect, Bhallu, who has been seen in the area several times though police have yet to arrest him, Masih said.

"Our Muslim neighbors are pressuring us to withdraw the case," he said. "They want us to reach an agreement with Bhallu and his friends. They want us to 'pardon' the criminals who have dishonored us."

Police are using delay tactics in the pursuit of Bhallu, Masih said.

"We told the Mustafabad police in-charge that the Muslims are forcing us to withdraw the case, but he is not bothered," Masih said. He added that some policemen had also asked him to withdraw the case, saying there was little chance his wife would get justice.

"They asked me to take money in return for withdrawing the case," Masih said. "They want that I should sell my wife's honor for money."

Investigating Officer Muhammad Sharif dismissed the Christians' accusations that police had sought money in exchange for dropping the case, and he refused to acknowledge that Muslims were threatening the woman's family and needed police protection.

Sharif told Compass that police were trying to arrest Bhallu.

"We took his father into custody but released him after interrogation," he said. "I will soon catch hold of Bhallu."

Sharif said the investigation would accelerate after the primary suspect is arrested.

As Masih and the few Christians daring to support him ponder their next step, the woman maintains a faint hope of getting justice in a country where Christians have little legal or societal standing. Mukhtar Masih, an elder of the area Presbyterian church, said the Christians were helpless as the Muslims held sway over local police.

"Several Christian women have complained that the Muslims have harassed them, but this is something that we have to live with every day," he said, adding that even though the community was shocked, no one was coming forward to help the family because "they are afraid of the Muslims."

Area resident Arif Masih told Compass that the Christians' fears were understandable.

"We don't have anyone who can face the police and the Muslims," he said. "What happened to Masih's wife is very tragic and can happen to any one of us, but is there really anything we can do about it?"

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## **Christian nurse in Pakistan boldly opts to report videotaped rape**

***Colleague tries to blackmail her into converting to Islam, marrying him***

By Murad Khan

Compass Direct News (08.09.2011) / HRWF (14.09.2011) – <http://www.hrwf.net> – A Christian nurse here filed a police report on Saturday (Sept. 3) alleging she was raped by a Muslim colleague who filmed the act in an attempt to blackmail her into renouncing her faith and marrying him, she and hospital sources told Compass.

Shaista Samuel, a 27-year-old nurse at the Services Institute of Medical Sciences (SIMS), filed a First Information Report (FIR) at Shadman police station accusing Ali Adnan, an assistant accounts officer at the hospital, and an armed accomplice of

abducting her at gunpoint from the government hospital on Aug. 21 and taking her to a house in Lahore where Adnan's accomplice filmed the rape.

"[Adnan] was holding my arm tightly and forcibly led me to a white car in the parking lot," Samuel said in tears, adding that as they approached the car, Adnan's accomplice came out of the shadows and placed a handgun to her head. "Adnan said that they would shoot me if I raised my voice. I was in complete shock ... my senses went numb, and I could not believe this was happening to me. They took me to a house in WAPDA Town [for housing Water and Power Development Authority workers in Lahore], where Adnan raped me while his friend filmed the entire incident. They ruined my life completely."

Christians have little legal or societal standing in Pakistan, and Muslim criminals tend to assume they will not be prosecuted if their victims are Christians.

Samuel said she had worked several years at the hospital on good terms with Adnan.

"I thought of him as a good friend, since we were working together... he used to visit my home often and was known to my family," she told Compass.

Recently, however, Adnan had begun acting strangely toward her, she said.

"He started criticizing Christians for not observing the purdah [covering of women] and of following our 'own brand of religion,'" she said. "One day when I was least expecting it, he told me that he had started liking me and that I should convert to Islam and marry him. I told him that I had always considered him just a friend, and that although I held him in great regard, marrying him was not possible since we belonged to different faiths."

Adnan began harassing her at the workplace and by telephone, she said.

"He used to block my way at the hospital, and then one day he forced his way into my house and threatened me and my family, saying that he would not rest until they marry me to him," she said. "He was acting like a mad man ... He started cursing my family and even tried to set the house on fire."

Disturbed by Adnan's obsessive behavior, Samuel said that she tried her best not to come into any sort of contact with him. On Aug. 21, however, as soon as she entered the hospital he approached her from behind and forced her to sit in a car in the hospital's parking area, she said.

"All this while, he told me not to make a commotion as it would only create an embarrassing situation for me," she said. "He said he just wanted to talk to me to 'clear up some misunderstandings.'"

He then led her to the white car, and the accomplice appeared. Samuel said the two men held her for over an hour and then dropped her back at the hospital, telling her that if she told anyone about the rape they would send the film to her family and also upload it on social networking sites.

In Pakistan, a rape victim is generally considered too shamed to resume a normal life or pursue marriage.

"I was devastated," she said. "I wanted the earth to open up and swallow me. I did not share my ordeal with any person, not even my parents. I did not have the courage to tell them that their daughter had been dishonored, and decided to keep my misery to myself ... I could not see my father and brothers face the shame brought by my bad luck."

Her misery did not end there – Adnan began trying to blackmail her by phone, she added.

“At first he demanded that I convert to Islam, and only then would he consider forgiving me for refusing his proposal,” she said.

When she refused, he began demanding sexual favors and threatening to come to her house and show the film to her family – Pakistanis tend to shame the victims rather than the perpetrators of rape – but Samuel refused to be manipulated by his threats, she said.

“My defiance angered Adnan to such an extent that one evening he turned up at my home and showed the film to my parents,” Samuel said. “He then told my shocked family that they had no other option but to hand me over to him ... he told them that he ‘owned’ me now.”

Adnan left the house, leaving the family, members of Church of Pakistan-affiliated St. Andrews Church, in deep anguish.

“We had a very tough decision to make,” Samuel said. “We could have either conceded to his demand or be ready to face the shame and dishonor by reporting his crime, but we chose the latter. Adnan must be punished for ruining my life. I thank God that he rescued me from Adnan’s blackmailing, otherwise I would have remained in mental agony for the rest of my life.”

Compass tried to reach Adnan for comment, but he was unavailable as he had turned off his cell phone.

Although Shaista and her family have filed an FIR with police, getting justice without higher government help may be difficult. At press time police had yet to arrest the two suspects, who fled their homes soon after the registration of the case and have managed to obtain pre-arrest bail.

“The police deliberately gave them time to get interim bails,” Samuel said. “My father and brothers have been going to the police station every day to ask them to record the statements of the accused, but the investigating officer of the case is using delay tactics. I’ve been asked ridiculous questions about the incident, but I will not be discouraged from seeking justice.”

Samuel said she was tired of suspicious and questioning eyes at her workplace and has taken leave from the hospital. The administration has formed a committee to probe into the matter.

“I am sick and tired of people staring at me and asking questions,” she said, adding that after she took leave, no one from the hospital administration had contacted her though she had heard of the committee’s formation. The two-member committee includes SIMS medical Superintendent Muhammad Javaid and the hospital’s finance director.

Javaid told Compass that the committee would record the statements of the complainant and the accused and would also examine the circumstantial evidence.

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## **Two Pakistani Christians seriously injured for refusing Islam**

***Muslims beat young men with iron rods, leave them for dead***



By Murad Khan

Compass Direct News (31.08.2011) / HRWF (01.09.2011) – <http://www.hrwf.net> – Two Christian men were seriously injured by young Muslim men this month in Karachi when they refused to convert to Islam, a family member told Compass.

Liaqat Munawar, a resident of Essa Nagri in Karachi, told Compass by telephone that his brother, Ishfaq Munawar, and another young Christian man, Naeem Masih, were returning home after an early morning prayer service at their church in Sohrab Goth on Aug. 14, Pakistan's Independence Day, when ethnic Pashtun youths near Sea View harassed and later attacked them.

"Ishfaq and Naeem were riding a motorcycle when six Pashtun youths signaled them to stop," Liaqat Munawar said. "They asked the two boys to identify themselves. Ishfaq told them that they were Christians returning from their church after a special prayer service."

The Muslims asked them why they were in Sea View, and they replied that they had made a brief stopover to participate in Independence Day celebrations at the beach, he said.

"The Pashtun youths then started questioning them about their faith and later tried to force them to recite the Kalma [Islamic conversion creed] and become Muslims, telling them that this was the only way they could live peacefully in the city," Liaqat Munawar said. "They also offered monetary incentives and 'protection' to Ishfaq and Naeem, but the two refused to renounce Christianity."

After cajoling the two Christians for some time, the Pashtuns sat in a white car parked nearby and eventually drove away. Ishfaq Munawar and Masih got back onto their motorcycle and were about to start it, Liaqat Munawar said, when suddenly the young Muslims reversed their car and rammed it into the Christians.

"The Muslims got out of the car armed with iron rods and attacked Ishfaq and Naeem, shouting that they should either recite the Kalma or be prepared to die," Liaqat Munawar said.

He said the Pashtuns severely beat the two Christians, fracturing Ishfaq Munawar's jaw and breaking five teeth, and seriously injuring Masih. He added that the two Christians fell unconscious, and the young Muslim men left assuming they had killed them.

Liaqat Munawar said his brother underwent jaw surgery at Abbasi Shaheed Hospital and is now recovering. He said the family had not registered a case with police, fearing reprisal by the Muslims, but were now considering filing a formal complaint.

This was not the first time Liaqat Munawar's family has witnessed religious violence, he said, as Pashtun Muslims last year attacked his cousin, Eric Sarwar, founder and executive director of the Tehillim School of Church Music and Worship, which is affiliated with the Presbyterian Church of Pakistan.

Liaqat Munawar also spoke of an incident in which Muslim Pashtuns shot at a Christian funeral passing through their area without any reason, injuring six Christians.

Elvis Steven, a Christian rights activist in Karachi, told Compass that he was in contact with the Munawar family, and that although he had yet to speak with the victims directly, he would attempt all possible means to have the assailants arrested.

"The situation is not that bad for Christians living in areas controlled by the Muttahida Qaumi Movement [MQM], but those living in areas dominated by the Pashtuns are under constant threat," Steven said. "The Pashtuns are extremist in their beliefs. They have a militant mindset, and there have been several incidents of religious violence involving the Pashtuns in Karachi."

While this violence was clearly religiously motivated, Karachi, Pakistan's financial hub, has been roiled by ethnic violence this year. Ethnic gangs backed by political parties have reportedly ratcheted up their turf wars, with the MQM, said to represent the majority ethnic Mohajirs, increasingly assailed by Pashtun and ethnic Baloch gangs.

Political parties representing all three groups, including the MQM, are fighting over rights to extort money from businesses and homes in Karachi, violence that some have falsely portrayed as religiously motivated violence.

Christians make up only 2.45 percent of Pakistan's population, which is more than 95 percent Muslim, according to Operation World.

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## **Many of Pakistan's Christian flood victims still homeless**

### ***Government said to allot land only to Muslims in southern Punjab Province***

By Murad Khan

Compass Direct News (09.08.2011) / HRWF (17.08.2011) – <http://www.hrwf.net> – Many Christians living in the southern belt of Pakistan's Punjab Province who lost their houses in last year's floods remain homeless despite a plan by the Punjab government to allocate land to residents in the area, area Christians said.

Hameed Masih, a resident of Kot Addu in Muzaffargarh district, said the provincial government has not set a quota for granting of land to members of minority communities left homeless by the devastating floods that began in late July 2010.

The government has begun four plans in Kot Addu under which around 435 plots of five marlas (151 square yards) each were to be distributed among people who lost their property. Several people were allotted land last month, but so far no minority member has been given land, he said.

"Christians in this area are not rich people," Masih said. "They lost their houses and lands in the floods and should have been given a 5 percent quota in the scheme. Flood victims could have been easily accommodated, but the quota system has not been followed, and thus no minority member has been allotted land."

Aid distribution was also initially unfair, he said.

"There were some problems in the beginning, but then minority members protested and the issue was resolved," he said.

Masih added that Christian families in his village are receiving monthly stipends from the government.

The list of homeless people was prepared by local land revenue officers who did not do so fairly, said another Christian. Sarwar Masih said he does not have property and does menial work for a living, but his name was not included in the list by the land revenue officers, or patwaris.

"Patwaris had to refer our names to higher authorities, but the names of those who could not 'make them happy' were not included in the list," he said. "My name was not in the list, so I had no hope of getting land, though being homeless I fulfill the criteria."

Areas where plots have been allotted include Gurmani Sharki, Jandeer Dueaja, Chak 568 and Chowk Sarwar Shaheed. There are some 8,500 registered minority voters, mostly Christians and Hindus, in these areas, with the total minority population said to be around 18,000.

"Several people who have been allotted plots under this scheme already have plenty of resources and land, while those who do not have property have been ignored," said a Christian identified only as Wasim, who is minorities coordinator of Kot Addu.

He added that one person who owns 22 acres of agricultural land has been allotted more land under the government rehabilitation plan.

Napoleon Qayyum, a minority rights activist and leader of the Minorities Wing of the Pakistan People's Party, said that under Pakistan's constitution, minorities should be given a 5 percent quota in all government plans. He added that the Punjab government should adhere to that quota as well.

Officials from the local administration responded to the allegations by saying they did not directly handle flood rehabilitation, adding that plots were allotted to homeless people through a lottery draw.

Chaudhry Ehsanul Haq Nolatia, a local Member of the Provincial Assembly from Kot Addu, said a committee was formed to look into the allotment.

"It is true that the government did not allocate any special quota for minorities in the scheme, but the plots were distributed through a draw," he said.

He added that he would take up the issue in the Punjab Assembly.

Flooding from monsoon rains affected the Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan regions and the Indus River basin, submerging about one-fifth of Pakistan's land. Close to 2,000 people died, and some 20 million people lost their livelihood, property or other infrastructure in the flooding.

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## **Pakistan's Christian sanitation workers swept into societal gutter**

***'Sweeper' leader faces suspension, criminal charges; for others, disease, death – and murder***

*The following news analysis was written by Asif Aqeel, director of the Community Development Initiative, a human rights group affiliated with the European Centre for Law and Justice.*

Compass Direct News (07.07.2011) / HRWF (12.07.2011) – <http://www.hrwf.net> – The often unseen or unrecognized abuses suffered by Christians at Pakistan's lowest level of society – street sweepers – have come into sharp focus this year.

While one Christian sanitation worker in Lahore has been suspended and criminal charges

filed against him for objecting to discrimination against fellow workers, another was killed the same month for not tending to a shopkeeper's command fast enough.

Anayat Masih Sahotra, who has worked as a street sweeper for Lahore's Solid Waste Management (SWM) department for 24 years, said he is facing baseless charges of forgery and fraud from his employers because of his work as a labor leader for area sweepers, who are nearly all Christians. He was suspended and accused of the crimes on May 14 after he asked SWM Managing Director Wasim Ajmal Chaudhry to fulfill a promise to make 400 Christian workers regular employees with full benefits, he said.

Sahotra said when Chaudhry refused his request to make the Christian sweepers regular employees according to the requirements of Pakistani law, he told the managing director that he could expect protests. Protest against injustice was their civil right, he said, and plans for a demonstration were underway when he received the suspension order alleging forgery and fraud.

When he went to Chaudhry's office again on May 26 to object to the injustice of the suspension order, he said Chaudhry referred to him and other Christian workers as Chuhras, an offensive term of contempt for street sweepers, an occupation assigned only to those of such low "untouchable" social standing that they are below the remnant caste system predating Pakistan's predominantly Islamic society.

"I know you low-born Christian Chuhras, and I know how to deal with you," Sahotra said Chaudhry told him.

Sahotra left Chaudhry's office, he said, only to receive a phone call a few minutes later from SWM Assistant District Officer Faiz Ahmed Afridi telling him to come to his office. Sahotra went to Afridi's office in the evening, where he was offered to sit and have a cup of tea, he said.

"While I was taking tea, police entered the office and arrested me," Sahotra said. "I was shocked how cunning Faiz had been to me."

Charges were filed the same day at Islampura police station, accusing Sahotra of criminally intimidating Afridi, though Sahotra said he was calmly taking tea when police arrested him.

The next day Sahotra was granted bail, but a few days later Anarkali police called him, saying the superintendent of police wanted to talk to him.

"The police of Anarkali are tricking me into meeting them," he said. "They want to arrest me on any other charge in order to mount pressure on me to withdraw my support to the Christian employees who are not being made regular despite having worked there for several years."

As temporary or "work charge" employees, the sanitation workers' contracts expire every 88 days, and they are hired every third month. This goes on for decades, with the employees working until they are too feeble to do so without any benefits or pension. They get no days off – no weekends, no holiday, no sick leave.

Their morning shift begins at 6 a.m., but the general public does not want them working when they are awake, so the sweepers prefer to clean streets beforehand. Starting at 4 a.m., they work until 7 p.m. for US\$100 per month, leaving them no opportunity to work any other part-time job. Thus they are kept poor, with no opportunity to provide quality education to their children, who perpetuate the cycle as they too become sweepers.

## **Murdered Sweeper**

The deep, culturally-rooted disparagement Christian sanitation workers suffer was apparent in another incident in May. Abbas Masih, 36, was cleaning the streets when he was murdered for not picking up trash quickly enough, human rights advocates said.

Eyewitnesses said Masih was cleaning streets in the Pir Maki area of Lahore on May 21 when Muhammad Imran, an Arain or agricultural caste member who worked at a flower shop, told Masih to pick up dried leaves and flowers from in front of the shop. Masih told him that he would gather them up when he came back from the end of the street.

"How can a Chuhra argue with me?" Imran said, and he took out a knife used at the flower shop and shoved it into Masih's heart, according to the witnesses. Masih fell. He was taken to a hospital, where he died.

Two brothers who own the shop, Muhammad Tariq and Muhammad Shehzad, told Compass that Imran had opened the store that morning. Imran asked Masih to pick up a small pile of dried leaves and flowers and take them away with the garbage, they said.

As witnesses also noted, they said Masih told him that he would pick up the trash upon his return from the end of the street. Imran insisted that he pick up the pile immediately.

"Imran called him names and then took out the knife and stabbed the heart of Masih," Shehzad said, adding that he was at home at the time but heard about it from another who came home from the scene of the incident. "I rushed to the spot, picked Masih up, put him in a rickshaw and rushed him to the Mayo Hospital. I also phoned the emergency police, Rescue 15, and informed the shop that Muhammad Imran must not be allowed to go, as Masih had passed away in the hospital."

He said that Masih was "a very good person."

The Lower Mall police station registered a First Information Report (FIR) only after several Christian leaders protested.

Although Masih had worked with SWM for 16 years, he remained a work-charge employee, so his family was not eligible for financial assistance upon his death. Several Christian leaders protested to the Chief Minister of Punjab Province, whose office in turn wrote to the SWM.

Based on feedback from the chief minister's secretariat, in a June 9 letter the SWM responded to the Christian leaders: "It is the policy of the government to grant financial assistance to the family of deceased civil servants, and work charge employees do not fall under the definition of civil servants. However, on the death of work charge employees during their engagement, it is the practice to pay financial assistance after getting the approval of the Chief Minister as a special case."

The chief minister has not responded to the request, and Christians said there is little possibility that he will consider it.

Though Christians account for 90 percent of sewage workers and an even high percentage of sweepers, they make up only 2.45 percent of Pakistan's population, which is more than 95 percent Muslim, according to Operation World. Masih's widow, Rukhsana Masih, said that she and her family members had feared filing a police report about the case – Pakistani police are notorious for falsely charging or otherwise harassing marginalized minorities like Christians – and that they were too poor to retain a lawyer. The Community Development Initiative, an affiliate of European Centre for Law and Justice, has since allayed her fears about the legal process and offered to assist her, and she has agreed to pursue justice.

## **Overlapping Religions**

When the Indian subcontinent was divided in 1947 and Pakistan was carved out in the name of Islam, ultimately there was a merging of Brahmanic Hinduism's ritual impurity with Islamic ceremonial uncleanness in regard to sweepers – almost all of whom were Hindu "untouchables" who converted to Christianity in the late 19th century.

This synthesis, however, came about over time. Initially the founding father of Pakistan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, had no notion of bringing religion into the sphere of political life. He was also an advocate of ending caste-based discrimination. With Jinnah's early death and the use of Islam for political gain by migrating, Urdu-speaking leaders who previously had no political bases here – in particular the first prime minister, Liaquat Ali Khan – over six decades Islam permeated every aspect of life: social, political, economic and legal.

After Pakistan became fundamentally Islamic, Muslims confused the notion of ceremonial uncleanness – considered temporary in nature in Islamic jurisprudence – with the Brahmanic notion of ritual impurity, considered innate and permanent. Islam forbids eating and drinking with a kafir or infidel, but it allows it with the "people of the Book." But as caste-based "untouchability" became confused with the Islamic notion of ceremonial uncleanness, Christians also came to be seen as ritually polluting a person or a thing.

Thus contempt toward Christians is deeply rooted, and there is no legislation to arrest this hatred. Rather, the state appears to want to keep Christians in this degrading occupation. Several job advertisements from government departments clearly state that sweeper candidates must be non-Muslim; some even specify that they must be Christians.

The Pakistani government hasn't evolved any modern system of maintaining hygiene in metropolitan areas, so Christian sweepers are forced to collect and discard garbage under filthy conditions. Rotten and stinking garbage is a source of several contagious diseases, and most of the sweepers have respiratory and skin problems. A large number of them suffer from tuberculosis and hepatitis B.

One reason Sahotra is struggling to get these workers full employee status is that as temporary workers they are not entitled to any Social Security Hospital. They are not considered government employees and hence are not entitled to treatment in hospitals for government employees.

The same situation prevails at the Water and Sanitation Agency (WASA), which maintains the sewage system, where about 90 percent of workers are Christians. They face extremely dangerous work conditions. When sewer lines clog because they are too small, these workers are not provided any protective gear as they sometimes dive 30 to 50 feet below ground into manholes filled with dirty and toxic water. When a sewer line gets unclogged, the strong flow sometimes carries away the worker.

Several sanitation workers have lost their lives due to toxic gasses in manholes. Overall, hundreds of people have lost their lives working for WASA, but their families do not receive the benefits that other government employees get because the workers do not have regular status despite working decades for the department.

## **Caste-Based Blasphemy**

One reason missionaries had such success in converting area Hindus to Christianity in the late 19th century was that conversion offered the community a way to socioeconomic as

well as religious emancipation.

Although a large number of Christians managed to escape the bondage by attaining education, still an overwhelming number of Christians were caught in an occupation that society rendered humiliating and degrading.

Several cases of Christians falsely charged under Pakistan's "blasphemy" laws have been rooted in such caste-based discrimination.

Asia Noreen (also known as Asia Bibi), sentenced to death in November 2010 for allegedly insulting the prophet of Islam, was working in the fields picking fruit when she took water from a bucket for all workers. Her co-workers argued that she had polluted the water by touching it, and that the water would be drinkable only if she converted to Islam. When she answered, they ensnared her in a blasphemy case.

Remnant Hindu Brahmanic notions of untouchability combined with Islamic fervor for conversion in Pakistan also figured in accusations of blasphemy against Rubina Bibi in Alipur Chatta, Punjab Province. She had bought ghee, an Indian oil used for cooking, but when she felt it was adulterated, she told the shopkeeper to return it and give her money back. The shopkeeper argued that the oil had been polluted for having been poured into the bowl of a Christian, so it could never be returned. The ensuing argument veered into religious issues that ultimately invoked Pakistan's blasphemy laws.

The hierarchical sense of superiority that marked Imran's alleged murder of Abbas Masih was also present in the ransacking of Christians' homes in Bahmaniwala, Kasur, in June 2009. Trolley driver Sardar Masih asked Muhammad Hussain to remove the motorbike that he had parked in the middle of the road. Hussain refused, asking how a "Chuhra" could give him an order.

The argument grew into a brawl between two families, with the inevitable accusation from the Muslims that the Christians had committed blasphemy. The entire Christian population of the village fled, and Muslims ransacked their houses.

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## **NADRA ordered to register Sikh marriages**

International Herald Tribune (06.07.2011) / HRWF (12.07.2011) – <http://www.hrwf.net> - The government has directed the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) to register marriages of the Sikh community.

To start the registration process, chairman of the Pakistan Sikh Council Sardar Ramesh Singh met NADRA Deputy Chairman Tariq Malik.

"NADRA will consider 'Annand Karraj' as the marriage certificate issued by Gurdwaras for verifying Sikh marriages," a senior official told The Express Tribune. The authority will verify certificates from the respective Gurdwara as well as the Sikh council, confirmed a statement issued by the NADRA office.

"NADRA is strictly following the government's policy that minorities should not be discriminated against on the basis of religion or sect," Malik said.

Singh acknowledged the efforts of NADRA to register minorities in the national database. The deputy chairman informed the delegation that NADRA has registered a total 5,852 Sikhs so far, including 3,105 men and 2,747 women.

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## **Court acquitted 70 Muslim extremists, who attacked Christians**

Minority Concerns in Pakistan (01.07.2011) / HRWF (04.07.2011) – <http://www.hrwf.net>  
- A Pakistani anti-terrorism court acquitted 70 people who were involved in the Gojra massacre of August 2009. On July 30, 2009, around 500 Muslim extremists attacked and burned more than 45 Christian houses – killing at least eight (8) Christians, seven (7) burnt alive while 18 sustained injuries. Two (2) churches were also set on fire. Threats against Christian witnesses force them to flee to avoid further violence. Muslim leader says Christians –deserve to be murdered.

In the aftermath of the attack, over 200 suspects were initially identified of which 17 were nominated to face charges, The Express Tribune (TET) reported.

Minorities Concern of Pakistan learnt that many witnesses left the country or kept silent because they fear of reprisal. It was evident that no protection was provided by the state organs to the witnesses. Christian leaders said that it was palpable that Christians of Gojra will not get justice.

Shahbaz Bhatti, late federal minister, identified the Sipah-e-Sahaba (a banned organization) as the group responsible for carrying out the attacks against the Christian community, TET reported on June 20, 2011. Attacks against minorities in Pakistan are now becoming more and more commonplace.

Pakistan is an Islamic country where religious minorities make up 3 % (Christians are about 1.5 %) of the total population of the country.

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## **Doubts and surprise among Christians over the first arrest in the Shahbaz Bhatti murder case**

by Jibrán Khan

AsiaNews (23.06.2011) / HRWF (04.07.2011) – <http://www.hrwf.net> – “It is very strange that after a long period of silence the police arrests someone who has worked with Shahbaz Bhatti for over 10 years and claims that he had a personal grudge against the late minister,” said Mgr Rufin Anthony, bishop of Islamabad. Speaking to AsiaNews, the prelate could not hide his disappointment and displeasure over the arrest of Hafiz Nazar Muhammad on Sunday (cf “Islamabad: first (odd) arrest for the murder of Catholic Shahbaz Bhatti,” in AsiaNews, 23 June 2011) who is the only person so far implicated by police in the murder of Pakistan’s Minority Affairs minister. Other Pakistani Christian leaders have voiced similar doubts and “surprise”. For them, the chain of events that led to the murder as described by police leaves many questions unanswered.

Originally claimed by Muslim extremist group Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, the responsibility for Shabbaz Bhatti’s murder now appears to be elsewhere, downgraded to squabbles within the Christian community. This is further sign that Christian minority is ever more marginalised, the bishop of Islamabad said, especially if we consider the fate of Paul Bhatti.

“Dr Paul Bhatti himself is not clear of his current and future status in the government,” the bishop said. “He has been given a ceremonial role of advisor to the PM, but the PPP government is abolishing the Ministry of Minority Affairs, in which case the advisor loses his portfolio. We have not heard a single word from him to condemn the step.”



At the same time, it is "surprising" that only now, Tahir Naveed Chaudhry, a lawyer and activist connected to Bhatti's All Pakistan Minorities Alliance (APMA), is saying that he "received letters mentioning Nazar Muhammad's involvement in the murder."

Equally odd is the fact that Chaudhry, a former member of the Punjab Provincial Assembly, was never questioned about it before now.

At present, law enforcement officers are interrogating Hafiz Nazar Muhammad, who was taken into custody after his movements were traced via mobile phone.

The suspect was arrested last Sunday, locked up in Islamabad's I-9 police station, and charged under Article 302 /34 of the Pakistan Penal Code.

According to the police report, which has raised eyebrows and many questions, Nazar worked closely with the Catholic lawmaker for at least ten years during which he came to nurse a grudge against his employer.

Speaking about the matter, Paul Bhatti confirmed that Chaudhry told him about "anonymous letters saying that Nazar Muhammad had played a role in the assassination."

Chaudhry "contacted the police who, after a thorough investigation arrested Nazar Muhammad," the brother of the slain minister said. Now, we are "waiting for the results of the interrogations."

The prime minister's special Minority Affairs advisor noted that all we have to go on at this point time is some suspicions" and that "it would be premature to say anything".

Yet, APMA members had started trading odd accusations from the beginning.

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## **Islamabad: first (odd) arrest for the murder of Catholic Shahbaz Bhatti**

AsiaNews (23.06.2011) / HRWF (04.07.2011) – <http://www.hrwf.net> - Islamabad police have arrested a man suspected of involvement in the murder of federal minister for religious minorities, Shahbaz Bhatti, a Catholic, who was assassinated last March 2. The police are interrogating Hafiz Nazar Muhammad, traced through mobile phone mapping. The suspect was arrested last June 19, imprisoned in the barracks I-9 Islamabad and charged under Article 302/34 of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC). The custody will be extended until June 25 for further investigation, although at present there is no evidence or testimony to confirm his involvement.

A Rawalpindi court judge has granted for five days of detention to allow police to question the suspect about possible accomplices. Nazar apparently phoned a lawyer belonging to religious minorities - Sargohda Tahir Chaudhry Nazeer – and confided that he knows the killers of Shahbaz Bhatti. Intercepted the call triggered his arrest.

According to the police reconstruction, which raises many concerns and questions, Nazar was a close collaborator of the Catholic lawyer's for at least 10 years. Police sources, reports The Express Tribune also add that the prisoner claims to be a Christian pastor and had unresolved personal issues against Bhatti.

Shahbaz Bhatti, the only Catholic minister in the executive of President Asif Ali Zardari

and Prime Minister Gilani, was killed March 2 last year in Islamabad. In the assault against his car - unprotected and without bodyguards - 30 rounds of gunfire were fired. The attack was claimed by the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, because of his positions against the law on blasphemy and for having championed the cause of Asia Bibi, a 45 year old Christian mother of five children on death charged under the "black law". In early January, Salman Taseer, Governor of Punjab was "executed" for the same reasons.

A few days ago 43 minute documentary on the life and work of the former Catholic minister, entitled: "A tribute to the martyr Shahbaz Bhatti", was released. The film was produced by Shadow Organization (<http://shadoworganization.blogspot.com> ) and presented in the Church of St. Fedelius in Khushpur, village in the district of Faisalabad (Punjab), where the late minister was born.

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## **Islamabad abolishes Minority Affairs Ministry, as Bhatti murder could go unpunished**

by Jibran Khan

AsiaNews (30.06.2011) / HRWF (04.07.2011) – <http://www.hrwf.net> – The murder of Shahbaz Bhatti, the Catholic Minister for Minority Affairs, on 2 March in Islamabad, could go unpunished. Investigators are divided over the case with some in the Islamabad police pointing the fingers at the Taliban and al-Qaeda. In recent weeks, an attempt was made to shift the blame to "internal squabbles" among Christians. Meanwhile, the government has decided to abolish the Federal Ministry of Minority Affairs, shifting responsibilities to the provinces, this in a country where Christians continue to die from abusive behaviour and personal vendettas.

Joint Investigation Team Chief Tahir Alam said that the file should be closed for "lack of evidence". After interrogating 519 suspects, including Mumtaz Qadri, who killed Punjab Governor Salman Taseer, Alam said that he had nothing to go on to find the culprits.

Likewise, Muhammad Hafiz Nazar was released by a judge. He had been recently arrested under suspicious circumstances—some observers suggesting that his detention was an attempt to divert attention from the case by hinting that Bhatti's murder was somehow connected to "internal squabbles" in the Christian community.

Backed by the Interior Ministry, Islamabad Inspector General Police Bin Yameen insists that Bhatti's murder leads to the Taliban and al-Qaeda. For him, Ilyas Kashmiri and his 3131 Brigade are to blame.

Kashmiri carried out various attacks against sensitive sites in the country, and may have died several weeks ago during a US drone attack.

"We have reasons to believe that the group carried out the operation" that led to the death of the Catholic minister, Nazar said.

Meanwhile, the federal government has announced its intention to abolish the Minority Affairs Ministry as part of a decentralisation plan that would see powers in this area transferred to the provinces.

For federal government leaders, this is an "historic step" to empower provinces. However, for many, it is also symptomatic of the climate of indifference and loss of control now prevailing in Pakistan, where Christians continue to die for the most futile and trivial motives.

The latest example dates to 21 June, when a Christian municipal sanitation worker in Lahore was stabbed to death by a Muslim merchant.

Muhammad Ilyas savagely attacked Abas Masih, a 40-year-old father of four, because the latter did not immediately heed his demand to clean the area outside his shop.

Initially, city authorities tried to prevent charges from being filed; however, pressured by local residents, police opened a first information report and arrested Muhammad Ilyas.

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## **Pakistani families flee after another Bogus 'Blasphemy' charge**

***Christian falsely accused after rescuing 8-year-old nephew from Muslim boys***

By Murad Khan

Compass Direct News (15.06.2011) / HRWF (22.06.2011) – <http://www.hrwf.net> – At least 10 Christian families in a village in Pakistan's Punjab Province have fled their homes after a throng of area Muslims accused a Christian of blaspheming Islam on Friday (June 10).

Yousaf Masih of village No. 68 AR Farmwala, in Khanewal district's Mian Channu area, told Compass that his brother Yaqub's grandson, 8-year-old Ihtesham (also known as Sunny), had gone out to fetch ice when Muslim boys from a nearby religious school started harassing him.

"The Muslim boys asked Sunny to recite the Kalma Tayyaba, Islam's foremost proclamation of Muhammad as prophet, and become a Muslim, and only then would he be allowed to go home," Masih said. "Sunny refused to repeat the Arabic verse, which infuriated the Muslim boys, and they started beating him up."

Masih said that his son Dildar Masih, a 26-year-old father of two boys ages 3 and 2, was going to his work as a painter when he saw the Muslim boys thrashing his nephew.

"Dildar rushed towards them and rescued Sunny from their attack," Yousaf Masih said. "Sunny told him that the boys were beating him because he would not recite their Kalma, at which Dildar rebuked the boys for forcing Sunny to renounce his religion. He then asked Sunny to return home and left for his workplace."

He added that a vegetable vendor named Falak Sher was also present and witnessed the incident.

Yousaf Masih said that he was later walking home when about 60 Muslims led by Qari Hasnain, a village prayer leader, stopped him.

"I later came to know that they were coming from my house," Yousaf Masih said. "They told me that Dildar had blasphemed Islam by abusing the Kalma. Hasnain claimed that he himself had heard my son abusing the Islamic holy words as he was standing in the entrance of his mosque, located near the site of the incident."

Yousaf Masih immediately begged forgiveness from them on behalf of his son, he said, and assured them that he would punish Dildar Masih if their allegations were true.

"But Qari Hasnain refused to accept the apology," he said. "He said that if they start

forgiving everyone for blasphemy, then it would become a routine for all to ridicule Islam. This further instigated the Muslims, and they said they would punish Dildar themselves.”

One of the Muslims asked the others to forgive them as Yousaf Masih had apologized for his son, “but they weren’t ready to listen,” he added.

“I knew my son’s life was in great danger, but I still assured them that we would bring him before them so that he could explain the situation,” Yousaf Masih said.

He went home, and soon at least 500 Muslims “besieged” his house, demanding that he hand his son over to them.

“It was later in the evening that we came to know that Qari Hasnain had telephoned the clerics of the neighboring villages, and they had made announcements calling on all Muslims to ‘come out for the defense of Islam’ after the Friday prayer,” he said.

Yousaf Masih said he never imagined the Muslims would resort to such tactics.

“The Muslims were shouting slogans like ‘Death to the blasphemer,’ and, ‘Christians must pay for ridiculing Islam,’” he said. “My brother Yaqub, his son Ayub and I came out of our house and tried to calm the violent mob, but they started shoving and cursing us ... they also manhandled my wife Iqbal when she came out of the house.”

His son, still working, had no clue what was going on back home. Yousaf Masih said the Muslims told him to bring his son to the property of Rana Tayyab, a local politician, in the evening, and “we had to say yes to them.”

Before they could meet, however, the village’s mosque loudspeakers began blaring again, urging “all the faithful to find the blasphemer and punish him,” he said.

Yousaf Masih said his son Dildar was not aware of the declarations emanating from the mosque and was caught unaware when the Islamic throng arrived at the house he was painting.

“They pounced on him like tigers,” his elderly father said. “They slapped him, kicked him, and my poor son didn’t even know why he was being tortured.”

During the commotion, a Pashtun villager named Noori, who knew the Christian family, arrived by motorcycle and somehow managed to rescue Dildar Masih from the mob.

“Noori took Dildar to his home, but the mob followed him, most of them armed with weapons,” Yousaf Masih said. “They surrounded Noori’s house and demanded he hand over the Christian to them so that they could kill him.”

Noori called the police to save Dildar Masih’s life, and a patrol car arrived.

“The police took Dildar to the Talumba police station, but within half an hour a crowd of about 2,500 Muslims gathered outside the building and demanded the police hand over Dildar to them,” Yousaf Masih said. “The police personnel present in the building knew the mob would go to any lengths to get their hands on Dildar, which is why they tricked the crowd by sending out a decoy vehicle to show that he was being sent to the city.”

Hasnain led clerics in spreading the word that Dildar Masih was at the police station, and more Muslims arrived. They blocked the main road and began protesting to pressure police into handing Dildar Masih over.

"Public announcements were made to kill Dildar," Yousaf Masih said, adding that he and other members of his family were about to head to the police station when some villagers advised them not to go. "They told us that Qari Hasnain had poisoned the minds of the people to such an extent that they would not hesitate to kill us also."

Police registered a blasphemy case against Dildar Masih, No. 211/11 under Section 298 of the Pakistan Penal Code and Section 16 of the Maintenance of Public Order, late Friday night (June 10).

## **Fleeing**

The next day the clerics again stirred up the masses, urging Muslims through the loudspeakers of area mosques to "take revenge."

Yousaf Masih said that Tayyab, the village leader, tried to calm the throng, asking them to control their emotions "since the main culprit had been arrested," but they paid no heed.

"We panicked after hearing the announcements," Yousaf Masih said. "Of the 10 Christian families living in the area, seven of us are related. We decided to immediately leave our homes, fearing for the honor and lives of our women and children."

The families locked their homes and left with whatever little money they had on them, he said.

"I had a cow, a donkey and two goats, but I could only take my donkey with me," he said. Tears flooding his eyes, he added, "I cut loose my cow and goat, because I didn't know when we would be able to return home. The poor animals would have died of starvation otherwise."

In all, the Christian families left behind at least 25 animals, including some cattle – which they fear may not be there when they return.

Yousaf Masih and his nephew Ayub arrived in Lahore on Monday (June 13) seeking legal assistance for Dildar Masih. At the office of the Community Development Initiative (CDI), an affiliate of the European Centre for Law and Justice, they told Compass that the 10 families had sought refuge with relatives.

"We are poor, but God has been kind to us, and we have been meeting our ends by working hard," said Ayub, father of the 8-year-old boy whose beating triggered the incident. "But since Dildar's arrest, everything has changed ... all our possessions are in our homes, but we cannot go back there."

The incident has so frightened the families that they were contemplating settling in some other village even if tensions calm in Farmwala.

Asif Aqeel of CDI said his organization will find a lawyer for Dildar Masih. He said that efforts would also be made to negotiate a safe return of the Christian families to their village after taking local Muslim elders into confidence.

"This may not happen overnight, but we are hoping that the Muslims will shift their focus from the other Christian families as the days pass," he said.

Repeated attempts to call the Talumba police station house officer to inquire about the safety of Dildar Masih went unanswered. A police official of the same station who requested anonymity, however, told Compass that police were exercising maximum caution.

"The situation is very volatile here," he said. "It's difficult to handle people's sentiments in cases such as this one."

Regarding Dildar Masih's whereabouts, he only said, "the suspect is at a safe place."

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## **Police in Pakistan torture sister of Christian who eloped**

### ***Sheikhupura officers attack office of legal team helping Christians fight false charges***

By Murad Khan

Compass Direct News (13.06.2011) / HRWF (21.06.2011) – [www.hrwf.net](http://www.hrwf.net) - Sheikhupura police this month tortured a young Christian woman into revealing the whereabouts of the legal team helping her family after an influential Muslim family kidnapped her and her sister, sources said.

Police also helped the Muslim family beat relatives of the Christian woman on court premises and attacked the offices of the organization trying to help her family, they said.

The Community Development Initiative (CDI) was providing legal assistance to the family of Sajid Ashraf Masih, whose elopement with a young woman from the Gujjar family in Sheikhupura last month led the influential Muslims to kidnap Masih's sisters, said Asif Aqeel, executive director of CDI. Gujjar family members kidnapped Rakhel Ashraf, in her early 20s, on May 13; they released her on May 17 but forcibly took her 17-year-old sister Maryam Ashraf that day.

CDI, an affiliate of the European Centre for Law and Justice, helped the family negotiate the release of the two Christian sisters and also made efforts for the return of the runaway couple in order to avert religious conflict in Ghazi Minara village, outside Sheikhupura in Punjab Province. Aqeel and others feared inter-religious tensions would put the lives of some 70 Christian families of the area in jeopardy.

He said the Gujjars had filed a case with Sheikhupura police of abduction of their daughter, Saleha, naming Rakhel Ashraf and three others, as a pressure tactic for the recovery of Saleha. Aqeel said none of those named in the case knew the whereabouts of the couple.

"CDI does not support any Christian who elopes with a Muslim girl at the cost of communal strife, but in this case we were only representing Rakhel and her cousin Inderyas Masih, who had been falsely implicated by the Gujjars," said Aqeel.

He said CDI managed to find the eloped couple, who had contracted a marriage by then, and convinced them to return to Lahore in order to help resolve the inter-religious tensions.

"The Gujjars are a very influential family of the area, and they had been threatening a repeat of the Gojra carnage if their girl was not returned to them," Aqeel said. "This was a serious situation for the Christian family and the other Christians of the area."

At least seven Christians were burned alive by Muslim mobs in Gojra after the spread of a rumor of blaspheming Islam on Aug. 1, 2009.

Aqeel added that Saleha's written statement before a judge of the Lahore District Court was critical in the acquittal of Rakhel Ashraf and Inderyas Masih.

"It was important that she make a statement before the court that she had eloped with Rakhel's brother Sajid and was not abducted as alleged in the Gujjars' First Information Report," he said.

## **Violence**

Aqeel said CDI had petitioned the Sheikhpura court for temporary pre-arrest bail for Rakhel on May 24, and the court had fixed a hearing on June 1 to make it permanent.

"On the day of the hearing, the CDI staff took Rakhel to Sheikhpura, but we didn't know that the Gujjars had planned to prevent her from appearing in the court," he said, adding that a relative of Rakhel, William Masih, fearful of what the Gujjars would do, made several calls to CDI Field Officer Napoleon Qayyum asking him to keep her from appearing before the judge.

"We suspected that something was not right, but getting her bail confirmed was very important," Aqeel said. "On reaching the courts, the CDI team informed William that she had reached there. The team did not know that the Gujjars were holding William's father-in-law, Hadayat Masih, who is Rakhel's maternal uncle, hostage on the court premises."

The Gujjars had told William Masih they would release Hadayat Masih only if he handed over Rakhel to them, Aqeel said. After receiving word from the CDI team, William Masih told the Gujjars that Rakhel had arrived.

"Hearing this, the men started beating him, Hadayat and another Christian accompanying him," Aqeel said. "They were helped by local lawyers and police personnel, and the CDI team narrowly escaped the attack."

Although Rakhel Ashraf had obtained temporary pre-arrest bail – the judge was on leave that day, June 1, when it was to be made permanent – police then took her into custody and tortured her into revealing the location of the CDI office in Lahore, about 70 kilometers from Sheikhpura, he said.

Aqeel said that the same evening, sources informed CDI officials that the Gujjars were coming to Lahore to attack their office.

"As soon as we got the information, we vacated the building to avoid any harm to our staff," he said. "However, we didn't know that a heavy police contingent was also accompanying them. I rushed home, fearing that the Gujjars might want to harm my family, and quickly took them to my in-laws' house."

The raiding party caused some damage to the office, he said.

Aqeel said that after finding no one there, the police raided the house of CDI's Qayyum in Youhanabad.

"We were already anticipating this move and had moved Qayyum's family to a safer place before the raid," he said, adding that neighbors told them later that the police had scaled the walls of the house and broken two doors in the process.

Qayyum told Compass that police raided his house again the next day (June 2).

"They forced my brother, Naveed Alam, to come outside and started humiliating him in an effort to trace my whereabouts," Qayyum said. "But this incident has not put fear in my heart, and I will continue to serve my community in all ways possible." Aqeel said that he told his staff members not to go to the office for several days.

"I feared that if any one of us was captured by the Gujjars, they would torture us into revealing the whereabouts of the couple, and this might put their lives in extreme danger," he said.

On June 3, Aqeel said, CDI lawyers managed to negotiate the safe return of Saleha to her family on the condition that they would stop harassing the Christians and also withdraw all cases registered against them.

"Rakhel's family says they are not being threatened now," Aqeel said. "No legal development has taken place, and the situation seems to have settled down by the grace of God."

Rakhel's brother, Abid Masih, confirmed that the family's ordeal seemed to have ended, as Saleha had been returned to her family – though her husband is still in hiding, and a divorce process is underway.

"The Gujjars have promised to withdraw all cases against us and also assured that they won't harm any of our family members," Abid Masih said.

A local clergyman identified only as Father Emanuel heaved a sigh of relief.

"All glory be to God, as a major situation has been averted," he said. "I was fearing much violence, because such issues are a matter of honor for the Muslims, and in this case the boy happened to be a Christian."

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## **Christian accused of 'blasphemy' granted rare bail**

***Move usually considered too dangerous in face of Muslim hostilities***

By Brian Sharma

Compass Direct News (04.08.2011) / HRWF (16.08.2011) – <http://www.hrwf.net> - In a rare move in Pakistan, a lower court in Punjab Province on Tuesday (Aug. 2) released on bail a young Christian man accused of blaspheming Islam.

The Magisterial Court of Chichawatni, Sahiwal district, granted bail to Babar Masih, who suffers from a psychiatric disorder that causes him to shout in fits of rage for as long as an hour without knowing what he is doing or saying. In the face of Islamic extremist threats, generally lower courts in Pakistan do not dare grant bail or acquit a Christian accused of blasphemy, leaving such decisions for higher court judges who enjoy greater security measures.

The complainant in the case, Zeeshan Arshad, states in the First Information Report (FIR) that Masih was "addressing the stars and calling names of Muslim sages and holy personages" when he made the alleged remarks blaspheming Islam. The FIR itself states that Masih never intended to hurt Arshad's religious feelings, and that no sane person would draw the ire of area residents by talking in this way.

On the day he made the alleged remarks (May 2), however, a large Muslim mob gathered that refused to hear that Masih was suffering any mental disorder. They demanded he be turned over to them so that they could kill him publicly. Chichawatni City police intervened and took Masih into custody.



At the Aug. 2 hearing, the courtroom was packed with bearded, hard-line Muslims and a tense calm prevailed, said Niaz Aamer, an attorney for the Center for Law and Justice-Pakistan (CLJ-P), which is representing Masih. Aamer said that the judge asked him to read the FIR, but the attorney requested that the judge read it himself, silently, due to the sensitive nature of the case. After arguments, the judge awarded bail.

Masih could not be released until the next day, however, because court orders arrived late to the police station. Sensing danger at the main entrance of the jail yesterday, staff members released him from a more inconspicuous "family gate."

During his time in jail, Masih was attacked, Aamer said. On May 26, as Masih was brought to court in a police van, an officer asked in a loud voice, "Where is the blasphemy accused?" As soon as Masih was identified, a bearded man among the accused in the van repeatedly hit Masih's face and head with his handcuffs before police intervened. The assailant was never brought to justice, Aamer said, though since that time Masih has been brought to court hearings in a separate van.

The judge granted bail even though a medical examiner declined to confirm Masih's mental condition. Though Masih's outbursts were witnessed several times while in jail, the Sahiwal Central Jail superintendent's medical examination report states, "He is a young man of average health. He gives history of some psychiatric illness before coming to jail. Inside jail he is vitally stable and well-oriented. However, to know the exact situation regarding his mental condition, he may be examined by the District Standing Medical Board at DHQ Hospital Sahiwal."

Masih's family provided doctor's prescriptions and medicine wrappers he used, but a police report presented in court on May 17 did not mention Masih's medical treatment.

His brother, Amjad Masih, previously told Compass that he had learned from witnesses that the accused was walking by the Canal Mosque looking upward and calling out names as the mosque leader was coming out and allegedly heard him using abusive language about Muhammad, the prophet of Islam. Amjad Masih arrived home to find a large number of Muslim clerics gathered outside who told him Babar Masih had used insulting language about Muhammad, which can be punishable by death in Pakistan.

Immediately after Masih was arrested, all three Christian families living in the area fled, including those of Masih's brothers, James Masih, and Amjad Masih. Since fleeing, James Masih's son Robin James has had to drop his engineering studies, and his daughter Sana James was unable to finish college exams, Aamer said. James Masih is still looking for work, and his other two daughters, eighth-grade students Shanza James and Sahira James, have also been forced to abandon their studies.

Amjad Masih was allowed to return to his residence after long negotiations with area clerics and a promise that he would never legally support his brother or else he would face similar charges, Aamer said.

"After Masih's release, Amjad Masih did not go home to meet with him or any of his family members, because it will be a danger for them," Aamer said. "Amjad cannot stay in the area if ever seen with Babar Masih."

The CLJ-P, an affiliate of European Center for Law and Justice, plans to file an application under Section 540-A of Pakistan's Criminal Procedure Code to exempt Masih from court appearances on grounds that it would be too dangerous, Aamer said.

"Babar Masih, who is mentally ill, was accused of blasphemy on May 2, 2011 and is released on bail within three months, while there are hundreds languishing in jails for years on blasphemy charges," Aamer said.

Christians make up only 2.45 percent of Pakistan's population, which is more than 95 percent Muslim, according to Operation World.

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## **A report on the status of religious minorities**

By Sherry Rehman

AHRC (06.06.2011) / HRWF (08.06.2011) – <http://www.hrwf.net> - As part of the Jinnah Institute's Open Democracy initiative, 'A Question of Faith': A Report on the Status of Religious Minorities in Pakistan' is a research-based analysis of the same. It documents the deterioration in the political, economic and social status of members of these communities in the context of the rising tide of vigilante violence and religious extremism in the country.

Two critical questions are addressed by the findings of this report. First, will Pakistani continue to discriminate against its citizens and turn a blind eye to the spread of cultures of cruelty and vigilantism? Second, will the majority of Pakistanis continue to condone and collude in the discrimination and persecution of minorities? These questions have become particularly relevant over the past year which saw violent attacks against the Christian and Ahmadi communities; extremist protests against amendments to the controversial blasphemy laws; and a rise in the number of cases of blasphemy brought against members of minority communities. The brutal assassinations of two staunch advocates of minority rights Salman Tasseer, Governor of the Punjab and Shahbaz Bhatti, Federal Minister for Minorities highlight the fact that urgent action is needed, and the recommendations of this report (pp. 7-10) need to be addressed.

The case studies set out in the report have been carefully selected from 125 interviews with members of some of Pakistan's religious minority communities by the research team. They serve to provide examples of: Mob violence against members of religious minorities, attacks on places of worship, problems faced by minorities in employment, problems faced by minorities in education, abductions and forced conversions of minority women.

While the situation is challenging, the report also recognizes positive initiatives from within civil society to challenge extremism. These are laid out in a section on local voices against discrimination and oppression.

In producing this work, the Jinnah Institutes supports a transition from Pakistan's institutionalized "two-tiered", citizenship (i.e. Muslim and non-Muslim), in to one that ensures equality of all citizens and the plurality that was envisioned by Mohammad Ali Jinnah. To view the complete report please view the attached file.

The report is available at <http://www.humanrights.asia/opinions/columns/pdf/AHRC-ETC-022-2011-01.pdf>.

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## **Muslim kidnap Christian girl over brother's "affair"**

Compass Direct News (19.05.2011) / HRWF (06.06.2011) – <http://www.hrwf.net> – An influential Muslim family in a village near Sheikhpura is holding a 17-year-old Christian girl hostage because one of her brothers allegedly eloped with a woman from the Muslim family. The Muslim parents have threatened further retaliation against the Christian

family if they do not produce their daughter, whom they have also threatened to publicly shoot dead as an "honor killing." An area clergyman identified only as Father Emmanuel called the situation "critical," saying it has pitted the area's 1,800 Muslim families against its 70-to-100 Christian families and could lead to violence. Abid Masih, a welder at a factory in Sheikhpura, told Compass by telephone that the family was asleep in their home in Ghazi Minara village on Friday night (May 13) when armed Muslims belonging to the village's influential Gujjar family arrived at their doorstep. They took him, his sister Rakhel, an uncle and a cousin to their house and beat them throughout the night in an effort to disclose the couple's whereabouts, he said. The Muslim woman who allegedly eloped with Sajid was identified as Saleha; both are in their early 20s. Masih said that on Saturday (May 14), the Gujjars freed the three Christian men but kept Rakhel hostage in their home, and on Tuesday (May 17), they released her but forcibly took her 17-year-old sister Maryam. "They have warned us that if we approach the police, they will turn the issue into a religious matter, and the bloodshed there would make the Gojra carnage small by comparison," he said. At least seven Christians were burned alive by Muslim mobs in Gojra after the spread of a rumor of blaspheming Islam on Aug. 1, 2009.

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### **"Blasphemy" laws pose growing threat – Special report – third of three**

Compass Direct News (13.05.2011) / HRWF (06.06.2011) – <http://www.hrwf.net> – Pakistan's notorious "blasphemy" laws can put even children at risk, and Christians say the days when they could teach their offspring pat answers to protect them from accusations of disparaging Islam or its prophet seem to have passed. A 30-year-old Pakistani woman who grew up in Lahore said her Christian parents taught her formula answers to keep from falling prey to accusations under the blasphemy statutes, such as "I am a Christian, I can only tell you about Him." Now radical Islamists have begun influencing Pakistani society, and parents teach schoolchildren not to discuss religion, she said. "We just tell children, 'Don't talk about religion in school.' This is shaky ground now." Thousands of Pakistanis who think and believe differently than mainstream Muslims are at risk of being slandered under the blasphemy law. Personal vendettas from neighbors, co-workers and rivals are the most common reasons blasphemy law cases are filed, according to Paul Marshall of the Hudson Institute's Center for Religious Freedom. "There are more victims from mobs and vigilantes than from the government itself, but the government bears responsibility because it does not protect the victims," he said. Pakistan is moving increasingly towards a state driven by fear of extremists, where even moderate politicians make conservative choices to appease Islamist threats, according to Sara Taseer Shoaib, daughter of Punjab Province Gov. Salman Taseer, who was murdered for his opposition to the blasphemy laws. "Pakistan is definitely becoming more right-wing and extremist when it comes to religion," she said.

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### **Mentally ill Christian charged with "Blasphemy"**

Compass Direct News (06.05.2011) / HRWF (06.06.2011) – <http://www.hrwf.net> – Police in Chichawatni, Sahiwal district have charged a mentally ill Christian with "injuring religious feelings" under Pakistan's widely condemned blasphemy laws. Three families related to 25-year-old Babar Masih – the only other Christian families in the area – have fled their homes after a Muslim mob threatened to harm them, relatives of the accused told Compass. Police in Chichawatni, Punjab Province registered the blasphemy case against Masih on Monday (May 2) after arresting him at about 10 p.m. that night; the young man's own family handed him over to police because a large number of Muslim clerics had gathered outside their house and demanded that he be turned over to them

so that they could "do justice" by killing him, relatives said. His brother, Amjad Masih, told Compass that Babar Masih has suffered a mental illness for the past six or seven years typified by fits of unprovoked rage, abusive language and lack of concern for food and clothing. Masih was charged under Section 298 of Pakistan's blasphemy statutes for "uttering words . . . with deliberate intent to wound religious feelings" and Section 298-A for "use of derogatory remarks . . . in respect of holy personages." Attorney Khurram Shehzad Maan of the European Center for Law and Justice's office in Pakistan said that the complainant clearly states in the First Information Report that Babar Masih was addressing the stars as he allegedly cried out against the prophet and holy personages of Islam, Maan said. "It means that the police must have come to know since the beginning that Babar was not a sane person, who was addressing stars, and also Babar never meant to injure feelings of any Muslims," Maan added. Police were not available for comment at press time.

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## **The growing situation of the Religious intolerance in Gujranwala**

Center for Legal Assistance and Settlement (03.05.2011) / HRWF (04.05.2011) – <http://www.hrwf.net> -- Following the unanticipated information about a brutal attack on the Christians in Aziz Colony & Gulzar Colony after alleged burning of the Holy Quran in Gujranwala, a CLAAS team headed by Mr. Joseph Francis accompanying with Mr. Nadeem Anthony and Mr. Sohail Habel rushed to the place of incident. The team visited the affected local residents of Aziz Colony & Gulzar Colony, meeting with Rev. Arthur James (Principal Presbyterian Theological Seminary-Gujranwala), police high officials, administrations and various others and found the following:

**The Incident:** CLAAS team was informed that today (Saturday) early in the morning a copy of a burned Holy Quran was found from the Khokharki graveyard, Gujranwala. The graveyard is nearly situated at the Christians vicinity. According to the details collected by CLAAS the information of alleged burning of a Holy Quran panic-stricken subjected to mob violence.

**The Terrorization:** The angry mob subsequently armed with sticks, iron rods, stones etc marched towards the Aziz Colony, Gulzar Colony, Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Mission Road, Presbyterian Church, Technical Training Gujranwala (CTTC) and several adjacent churches belongs to different congregations. The infuriated mob blamed the Christians of the area for the burning of the Holy Quran. They protesters chanted slogans during rallies demonstrated from different streets of the area. The enraged mob started their cruelty burning tires set on fire at front gate of the Regional Police Officer (RPO) Gujranwala, Sialkot Road, Aziz Abad, Saeed Abad and Civil Lines. At first the annoyed mob stoned at the newly constructed building of the Presbyterian Theological Seminary and broke the glass.

**Brutal Attack in Aziz Colony:** The rumors sparked in the vicinity that Pastor Eric Isaac burned the Holy Quran and the protesters approximately comprising over two thousands attacked on his charity school and destroyed everything in the school in particular broke the windows glass, rip apart the doors of the classrooms, exterminate the birds, wrecked the furniture, buffalos made suffer and also tried to kill the person take caring the school.

**CLAAS team visited different affected areas and recorded the testimonials of the following:**

**Mr. Shaukat Gill (the caretaker of the attacked school):** Mr. Shaukat Masih aged 50 and resident of Aziz Colony and the caretaker of the wrecked school narrated the whole episode of violent attack and said around 06:30am in the morning two police vehicles

came in the school for security. After fifteen minutes of police arrival around 06:45 a mob of hundreds of people entered in the school premises and started breaking the windows glass, rip apart the doors of the classrooms, exterminate the birds, the buffalos were made suffer and also tried to kill him but he managed to escape from the place of occurrence. Mr. Shaukat added that the protesters also destroyed other properties belongs to Pastor Eric Isaac. The CLAAS team looked into the smashed portions of the school accordingly.

**Mr. Daniel Masih:** Another resident of the Aziz Colony said "he is surprised over the growing situation of religious intolerance and never expected the brutality. He said they wished to live with peace and harmony. He further said that the Christians are peaceful and almost 90% Christians of Aziz Colony and Gulzar Colony fled from their houses over fears of violence and saved their families to avoid any unpleasant incident. Mr. Hameed Masih: He stated when the protesters were attacking on the school and chanting slogans against Christians he was on his rooftop and saw the whole occurrence. He saw the angry protesters were fully armed with sticks and stones were in their hands but unfortunately was unable to protect.

**Pastor Amin:** Pastor said they have grave concerns over the worst situation of intolerance and is worried about the law and order state of affairs.

**Mr. Rasheed Sabir and Mr. Javed Akhtar:** They recalled the situation of two weeks ago, the starting worst situation of the vicinity when Mushtaq Gill and his son Farrukh Mushtaq Gill falsely blamed for the disrespect of Prophet Muhammad and desecrating the pages of the Holy Quran. They further informed CLAAS that the Christians are living here since the creation of Pakistan and no one among the Christians can do such a heinous crime against any religion.

**Mrs. Susan:** A seventy years old lady stated she is concerned over the situation and sad that the Christians of the locality are out of their homes. She prayed for the Muslim brothers (the protesters) and hoped for peace and harmony in the country. She added that she born here in this colony and how she can leave her place of birth.

**Mr. Muhammad Imran (Security In charge):** The CLAAS team inquired about the arrest of the alleged accused persons the communal tension including Molvi Irfan, Molvi Majeed, Molvi Malik, Dr. Irfan, Arshad Butt and Sharif Saroyyia alias Changar. Mr. Muhammad Imran informed the CLAAS that soon the criminals will be booked.

### **Muslim eyewitnesses**

The areas Muslims also shared their concerns over the situation and were shocked over the mob violence. They further said the religious fanatics are destabilizing the situation of peace and harmony in the country especially in Gujranwala. Christians of the area are peace loving and never alleged for desecrating the Holy Quran. The so-called members of the religious political parties are promoting anarchy in the country and encouraging the hands of the extremists.

**Meeting with Regional Police Officer (RPO) Gujranwala:** The CLAAS also was meeting with Mr. Ahmad Raza Tahir (Regional Police Officer-Gujranwala), in the meeting church leaders and senior police officials including Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Gujranwala, Superintendent of Police (SP) Cantonment Gujranwala, Superintendent of Police (SP) City, Deputy Inspector General (DIG) Investigation Gujranwala etc and other high officials from the district administration were also present in the meeting. The RPO Ahmad Raza briefed about law & order situation and also explained that how the police broken up the mob threatening to burn the Churches, Christian colonies and educational institutions after the alleged burning of the Holy Quran. The police used tear gas, intense aerial firing, and baton-charge and stopped the angry mob to attack. Mr. Ahmad Raza further added that police has been booked 150 protesters so far and the police

attentively broke up the plans of attack of the protesters. Six police guards injured and the moment they are out of danger. Finally the RPO gave assurance for the protection of Christians of the area and pledged that the culprits will be punished according to law.

### **Observations/Findings**

1. Pastor Eric Isaac was blamed for the alleged burring of the Holy Quran while he was detained by the police some two days ago.
2. The Christians of the Aziz Colony and Gulzar Colony are still out of their houses.
3. According to the police the situation is under control but the psychological loss is bigger.
4. The economic jealousies against Christians are on high in the vicinity and they are well educated, has their own business and properties.
5. Some unknown people of the area are showing the wrong side of the blasphemy laws and trying to harm the Christians in the name of religion.
6. The timely interventions of the police saved the Christians from the big massacre.
7. The spreading information regarding burning of churches, houses and killings of the Christians were baseless only a school and a home were attacked but the attack damaged the trust.
8. CLAAS also observed that the religious harmony & interfaith committees instead of stopping the enraged protesters they are just holding the meetings and not advising the Muslim protesters.
9. The Muslim residents of the area shared that the attackers were outside form their area and only attack on the school and left the other proprieties of the Christians.

### **Conclusion**

In previous report of communal tension CLAAS has warned about the growing situation of religious intolerance and also was concerned that the furious activities of the religious extremists must be stopped otherwise these incidents of violence will continue in future. Once again the radical used the blasphemy law to settle personal grievance and encourages extremists. Reported By, CLAAS-Pakistan, [Joseph\\_francis2010@yahoo.com](mailto:Joseph_francis2010@yahoo.com)

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## **Christians left their homes after Muslim mob attacked them**

By Aftab Alexander Mughal

Minorities Concern of Pakistan (02.05.2011) / HRWF (04.05.2011) – <http://www.hrwf.net>  
– At least 20 people, including police officials, were wounded as 500 Muslim demonstrators turned ugly and attacked the Christian community in Gujranwala city on April 29, 2011, Minorities Concern of Pakistan has learnt.

The attackers, who accused certain members of the Christian community of committing blasphemy, entered a Christian school and broke the furniture there and also attempted to attack a church. The angry demonstrators armed with sticks and their fiery rage marched on the streets of Gujranwala towards a church. Police broke up the mob and saved the Church.

Bruce Bhatti, a Christian social worker, told Minorities Concern of Pakistan that situation is still very tense in the city and Christians are very scared.

Police arrested 25 people (3 Christians including a priest) for their involvement in the disturbances. Although police are now patrolling the area, most members of the Christian community had locked their residences and fled the area.

The trouble started two weeks ago. Muslims are accusing three Christians, Rev. Eric Issac, Mushtaq Gill and his son Farrukh Mushtaq Gill, for blasphemy. Police initially registered a case against Christians and arrested two Christian, Mushtaq Gill and his son Farrukh Mushtaq Gill on April 14, 2011 at Aziz Colony, allegedly desecrating the holy Quran.

Mushtaq Gill, 60, is the vice principal of a Christian Technical Training Centre (CTTC), which is a part of the theological seminary in Gujranwala.

On April 16, dozens of Christian families were forced to escape from a Christian settlement Khokharkee consisting of four colonies (Islam Colony, Mission Compound, Gulzar Colony and Aziz Colony) in Gujranwala city (in Punjab, 28 miles from Lahore), attacked by hundreds of Muslim militants. The police took into custody 12 Christians who had protested against attack.

Mushtaq, Farrukh and a few more Christians are in police custody for investigation since April 19, 2011 till this day, according to National Commission of Justice and Peace (NCJP).

The sequel of protests continued during the Holy Week and Easter. Good Friday Services in all churches in the city had to be closed till 2:00 p.m. on the instruction of Superintendent Police Gujranwala. After Friday prayers, the local Muslims staged protest chanting slogans against the Christians and accused.

On April 30, 2011 morning another copy of the burnt holy Quran was found by unknown person in a Muslim graveyard near a Christian settlement at Aziz Colony in Gujranwala at 6:00 a.m. The police took that copy in custody. On the same early morning, a couple of hundred men gathered and attacked a Christian school named Reemab Education City School, Dera (a dwelling in the farms) belonging to Pastor Eric Isaac and house of Anwar Khokhar, who was taken in police custody for investigation. The windows, fans and furniture of the school were damaged. The attackers pelted stones at houses whereas police baton charged to scatter the miscreants

Banners were hung over Gujranwala's roads by local Muslims that say, "We strongly condemn the ghastly incident of burning Quran and blasphemy against Prophet (PBUH) by these Christians, Sons of Bitches."

Gujranwala and surrounding areas are among the most active centres of Islamic militant groups. The city of Gujranwala, inhabited by over 4 million Muslims and 0.1 million (100,000). Only 2,500 Christians live in that locality. Christians has been very tense in past 18 days after sad happenings about desecration of Quran.

"Our public's susceptibility to anything even slightly related to the mere mention of blasphemy is fast becoming ludicrous. It is so easy to incite people to violence whether from the pulpit of the mosque or the vicious rumours aimed at targeting our minorities. Christians have long been the victims of blasphemy charges, intolerance and mob violence," Daily Times' editorial says on May 1, 2011.

State inaction and public silence over the assassinations of Taseer and later Minorities Affairs Minister Shahbaz Bhatti have allowed many prejudiced people to think they can get away, literally, with murder, the newspaper added.

According to NCJP, the Gujranwala administration has so far handled the matter carefully. A Peace Inquiry Committee was formed involving Christian and Muslim religious leadership which met regularly to identify the elements that disturb peace or create unrest.

Fortunately, a vast number of local Muslims expressed their solidarity with the Christians saying that they have coexisted for generations and they know local Christians maintain respect for Quran and belief of the Muslims, NCJP says.

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## **Rioting Muslims damage church, properties**

Compass Direct News (02.05.2011) / HRWF (06.06.2011) – <http://www.hrwf.net> – Hundreds of Muslims in Gujranwala on Saturday (April 30) attacked Christians' homes, a school and a Presbyterian church building after learning that police had released two Christians accused of "blasphemy" – amid reports of another alleged desecration of the Quran. Mushtaq Gill and his son Farrukh Mushtaq were released on Friday afternoon (April 29) after a handwriting expert hired by police determined that the latter had not written a threatening note accompanying burned pages of the Quran, police sources said. The two Christians had been taken into protective custody on April 15. On Saturday morning (April 30), however, as news of their release spread, a Muslim claimed that pages of the Quran had been burned in Gujranwala's Aziz Colony cemetery in Punjab Province. Announcements over area mosque loudspeakers began blaring, and Muslim residents and members of extremist groups began gathering. The mob started rioting and hurling rocks at the houses of Christians, including a school owned by a Christian, Eric Isaac, who was among eight Christians police took into custody for questioning, as well as at a neighborhood church building. At least 18 people – 15 Muslim protestors and three policemen – were injured and had to be hospitalized after police used tear gas and batons to disperse the mob. There were no reports of injured Christians. Around 150 protestors were arrested, with two cases registered against them for attacking Christian property and "creating a law and order situation." Retired Maj. Timothy Nasir, principal of Faith Theological Seminary in Gujranwala, told Compass by telephone that the violent riots had forced a large number of Christian families to flee.

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## **Detained Pakistani Christian released – but two others arrested**

### **Christian falsely accused of 'blasphemy' taken into custody, released – and detained again**

By Shehryar Khan

Compass Direct News (18.04.2011) / HRWF (19.04.2011) – <http://www.hrwf.net> – A Christian illegally detained in Faisalabad on false blasphemy charges was freed last night, while two other Christians in Gujranwala arrested on similar charges on Friday (April 15) were also released – until pressure from irate mullahs led police to detain them anew, sources said.

Masih and his family have relocated to a safe area, but just 10 days after he was falsely accused of desecrating the Quran in Faisalabad district of Punjab Province on April 5, in Gujranwala Mushtaq Gill and his son Farrukh Mushtaq were taken into "protective custody" on charges that the younger man had desecrated Islam's holy book and blasphemed the religion's prophet, Muhammad. A police official told Compass the charges were false.

Gill, an administrative employee of the Christian Technical Training Centre (CTTC) in Gujranwala in his late 60s, was resting when a Muslim mob gathered outside his home in Aziz Colony, Jinnah Road, Gujranwala, and began shouting slogans against the family.



They accused his son, a business graduate working in the National Bank of Pakistan as a welfare officer and father of a little girl, of desecrating the Quran and blaspheming Muhammad.

The purported evidence against Farrukh were some burnt pages of the Quran and a handwritten note, allegedly in Farrukh's handwriting, claiming that he had desecrated Islam's holy book and used derogatory language against Muhammad. A Muslim youth allegedly found the pages and note outside the Gills' residence.

Inspector Muhammad Nadeem Maalik, station house officer of the Jinnah Road police station, admitted that the charges against the accused were baseless.

"The initial investigation of the incident shows Mr. Gill and his son Farrukh are innocent," he told Compass.

The two were kept at a safe-house, instead of the police station, out of fear that Islamist extremists might attack them; their subsequent release led to Islamic protests that compelled police to detain them anew today, sources said.

Despite police admitting that the two Christians were not guilty, a First Information Report (No. 171/2011) was registered against them under Sections 295-B and C in Jinnah Road Police Station early on Saturday (April 16).

"Yes, we have registered an FIR of the incident, yet we have sealed it until the completion of the investigation," Inspector Maalik said, adding that the police had yet to formally arrest Gill and his son. "We registered the FIR for their own safety, otherwise the mob would have become extremely violent and things could have gone out of control."

The police official said that after the Muslim youth made the accusation, he gathered area Muslims together.

"It seems to be a well thought-out scheme, because the perpetrators chose the time of the Friday prayers for carrying out their plan," Maalik said. "They were sure that this news would spread quickly, and within no time people would come out of the mosques and react to the situation."

He added that police were now inquiring of the Gills why they might suspect anyone of wanting to harm them.

"We are also looking for any signs of jealousy or old enmity," Maalik said.

Soon after the Muslim youth found the alleged pages, announcements blared from the area's mosques informing Muslims about the incident and asking them to gather at the "crime scene," sources said.

There are about 300 Christian families residing in Aziz Colony, and news of the alleged desecration spread like jungle fire. Announcements from mosques sparked fear in the already shaken Christian families, and they started packing their things to leave the area, fearing the kind of carnage that ravaged Gojra on Aug. 1, 2009, killing at least seven Christians.

"It's true...the news of the accusations against Gill and his son and the announcements being made from the mosque calling on Muslims to avenge the desecration sent shivers down our spines," said Pastor Philip Dutt, who has known the Gill family for several years and lives in the same neighborhood. "The charges are completely baseless. I'm sure no

person in his right frame of mind would even think of committing such a vile act. Someone has clearly conspired against the Gill family.”

He added that most of the area’s Christians had left their homes overnight, fearing an attack by Muslims.

Dutt said that a large police contingent arrived in time and took Gill and his son into custody after assuring the enraged mob that a case under the blasphemy laws would be registered against the two men. Police remained stationed in the area to provide protection to area Christians, but the atmosphere was tense.

According to some reports, a group of angry Muslims wanted to torch Gill’s house, but timely police intervention thwarted their plan.

At the same time, a group of Muslim extremists stormed into the house of Anwar Masih, a Christian factory owner in Aziz Colony, and started beating him and his son, sources said. The family managed to save themselves by calling the police and now they too are in “protective custody.”

The Rev. Arif Siraj, moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Pakistan, which also oversees the functioning of the Christian Technical Training Centre in Gujranwala, said the accusations against Farrukh were yet another example of how the country’s blasphemy laws are misused against innocent people.

“We have been engaged with the police and local Muslim leaders throughout the day to resolve this issue amicably,” Siraj said. “An eight-member committee comprising six Muslims and two Christian pastors has been formed to probe the incident, and they will make a report on Friday.”

The names of the Christians of the eight-member committee are Pastor Sharif Alam of Presbyterian Church Ghakarmandi and the Rev. Joseph Julius.

A large number of Muslims, including members of religious parties and banned outfits, came out to the roads of Gujranwala on Saturday (April 16) to protest the alleged desecration of the Quran and pressure police to take action against Gill and his son. The protestors reportedly gelled into one large demonstration on Church Road and headed towards the CTTC. Siraj said that some participants threw stones at a church on the road, but that Muslim elders immediately halted the stone-throwing.

“The district administration and Muslim leaders have now assured us that no one will target Christian churches and institutions,” he said, adding that both communities were now waiting for the committee’s report.

Sohail Johnson of Sharing Life Ministry expressed concern over the accusations.

“This case is a classic example of how Christians and Muslims continue to be charged with blasphemy on false accusations,” he said. “Isn’t it ridiculous that the accuser is claiming that Farrukh has confessed to burning the Quran in his note and thrown the burnt pages in front of his house – what sane person would even think of saying anything against prophet Muhammad in a country where passions run so deep?”

Arif Masih, the falsely accused Christian released last night, has reportedly been relocated along with this family to a safe location.

The original blasphemy law, introduced in British India in 1860, imposed a prison term of up to two years for any damage to a place of worship or sacred object carried out “with the intention of thereby insulting the religion of any class of persons or with the

knowledge that any class of persons is likely to consider such destruction, damage or defilement as an insult to their religion..."

The current provision in the Pakistan Penal Code, as amended in 1986, introduces both the death penalty for insulting Muhammad and drops the concept of intent. According to Section 295-C of the Penal Code, "Whoever by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representation, or by any imputation, innuendo, or insinuation, directly or indirectly defiles the sacred name of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) shall be punished with death, or imprisonment for life and shall also be liable to fine."

The laws have drawn condemnation across the world, and two senior government officials – Punjab Gov. Salman Taseer, a liberal Muslim, and Federal Minister for Minorities Shahbaz Bhatti, a Christian, have been assassinated this year for demanding a review of the legislation.

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## **Pakistani Christian falsely accused of 'blasphemy' illegally detained**

***Policeman says Arif Masih, held at an undisclosed location, is innocent***

By Anthony Solomon

Compass Direct News (15.04.2011) / HRWF (18.04.2011) – <http://www.hrwf.net> - Police in Punjab Province, Pakistan have illegally detained a Christian on a "blasphemy" accusation, even though one officer said he was certain an area Muslim falsely accused 40-year-old Arif Masih because of a property dispute.

On April 5 Shahid Yousuf Bajwa, Masih's next-door neighbor, initially filed a First Information Report (FIR) against "an unidentified person" for desecrating the Quran after finding threatening letters and pages with quranic verses on the street outside his home in Village 129 RB-Tibbi, Chak Jhumra, Faisalabad district. Desecrating the Quran under Section 295-B of Pakistan's blasphemy statutes is punishable by up to 25 years in prison.

"Some identified person has desecrated the Holy Quran and has tried to incite sentiments of the Muslims," Bajwa wrote in the FIR. Clearly stating that he did not know who had done it, he wrote, "It is my humble submission to the higher authorities that those found guilty must be given exemplary punishment."

Bajwa charges in the FIR that when he went outside his home at 9 p.m. and found the pages, he looked at them by the light of his cell phone and thought they were pages of the Quran. Masih's uncle, Amjad Chaudhry, told Compass the pages look like those of a school textbook containing quranic verses.

Chaudhry said Bajwa and his two brothers are policemen. After Bajwa found the pages and the threatening letters, Chaudhry said, he arranged for an announcement to be made from the loudspeaker of the area mosque.

"The message urged all the Muslims of the village to gather there due to the urgency and sensitivity of the matter," Chaudhry said.

He said initially local Muslims were very angry and suggested that Christian homes be set ablaze, but that others said the Christians should be first given a chance to explain whether they were responsible.

"Then some Muslims began saying that because Arif Masih lived on this street, he would be the person who could have done this crime," he said. "However, most of the people who gathered there said that they knew Arif Masih well and they could not imagine he could do such a vile thing. But others insisted that because Masih was the only Christian who lived on the street, only he could be suspected of the crime."

At about 10 p.m. on April 5, Chaudhry said, Bajwa's brother Abdullah Bajwa called Masih to the Siyanwala police station, where he was arrested; Masih's family members were unaware that he had been arrested.

According to Section 61 of Pakistan's Criminal Procedure Code, an arrested person must be produced within 24 hours before a court; Masih has been detained at an undisclosed location without a court appearance since April 5, with police failing to register his arrest in any legal document, making his detention illegal. Investigating Officer Qaisar Younus denied that Masih was in police custody, but Superintendent of the Police Abdul Qadir told Compass that Masih had been detained for his own safety.

Younus told Compass that he was sure Masih was innocent, but that he had been falsely accused because of a land dispute.

### **Property Conflict**

According to Chaudhry, about two years ago Masih bought a plot next to his house that another villager, Liaquat Ali Bajwa (no relation to Shahid Yousuf Bajwa) wanted to buy – and who despised Masih for it, telling the previous owner, "How come a Christian can buy the plot that I wanted to buy?"

The parcel owner had given Masih preference as he knew him well, and he understood that the homeowner adjacent to the property had the first rights to it anyway.

At the same time, Ali Bajwa was able to seize about five square feet of the house of a Christian named Ghulam Masih after the wall of his home was destroyed in last year's flooding. Feeling he was not in position to challenge Ali Bajwa, Ghulam Masih sold the land to Arif Masih so that he could take charge, Chaudhry said.

Arif Masih subsequently filed a civil suit against Ali Bajwa to evict him from his property. Chaudhry said Arif Masih was about to win that case, and that Ali Bajwa thought he could retain that property and obtain the one Arif Masih had purchased by accusing him of blasphemy with the help of police officer Shahid Yousuf Bajwa.

Ali Bajwa had been threatening Masih, saying, "You will not only give me this plot, but I will even take your house," Chaudhry said.

Chaudhry said he had learned that Shahid Yousuf Bajwa felt badly after villagers criticized him for falsely accusing an innocent man of blasphemy, but that Bajwa feared that if he withdrew the case he himself would be open to blasphemy charges.

### **Neighbors**

Arif Masih's family has remained steadfast throughout the case, refusing to flee the area in spite of the possibility of Muslim villagers being incited to attack them, Chaudhry said.

"It all became possible because of Muslim villagers who sided with us," he said.

Chaudhry said that when police arrived at the scene of the Muslims who had gathered with the pages and the threatening letters, the villagers told officers that they had not

seen who threw them on the street. He said that the letters included the threat, "You Muslims have failed in doing any harm to us, and now I order you all to convert to Christianity or else I will shoot you all."

The letters did not bear the name of the person who wrote them, he added.

On Monday (April 11), Chaudhry managed to meet with Masih, though Masih's wife has yet to see him. Chaudhry told Compass that the first thing Masih asked him was whether everyone was safe, as there are only three Christian families in the area of about 150 Muslim homes.

"If the mob had decided to harm our houses, then it would have been very devastating," Chaudhry said.

After Masih was arrested, at midnight police came to his house and began beating on the main gate, Chaudhry said. When Masih's wife, Razia Bibi opened the door, the officers rushed into the house and searched it.

"They were looking for some proof, but thank God they could not find anything that could even be remotely linked with the incident," he said.

Chaudhry added that police have not mistreated Masih, but he said the matter has lingered so long that he feared police may involve him in the case, or that "things may go wrong like in most blasphemy cases."

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## **Bombs kill 42 at shrine in Pakistan**

By Alex Rodriguez

Los Angeles Times (03.04.2011) / HRWF (05.04.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - Two suicide bombers killed at least 42 people at a shrine in central Pakistan on Sunday, the latest in a series of attacks on places of worship linked to sects opposed by militants.

The attack occurred at Sakhi Sarwar, a Sufi shrine in a village outside the southern Punjab city of Dera Ghazi Khan. In the past, Sufi shrines have been targeted by the Pakistani Taliban and other militant groups that regard the strain of Islam to be tantamount to heresy.

More than 1,000 people had gathered at the shrine when the bombers detonated suicide vests filled with explosives. One bomber's vest did not completely explode, and television footage showed the man writhing on the ground while rescue workers removed the vest and treated him.

Natiq Hayat, an emergency coordinator for the Dera Ghazi Khan district, said at least 80 people were injured in the blasts, 30 of them critically.

The Pakistani Taliban, the country's homegrown insurgency, and Sunni Muslim extremist groups such as Sipah-e-Sahaba have frequently targeted sites belonging to sects they oppose. Reuters reported that the Pakistani Taliban claimed responsibility for Sunday's attack.

In October, a bomb planted on a motorcycle killed five people at a famed Sufi shrine in the town of Pakpattan in Punjab province, about 110 miles southwest of Lahore. That same month, two suicide bombers attacked crowds visiting a shrine in the country's largest city, Karachi, killing at least eight people and injuring 65 others. The Karachi blasts targeted worshipers at a shrine for Abdullah Shah Ghazi, an 8th century Sufi Muslim saint.

Last summer, twin suicide blasts killed 42 people visiting Pakistan's most popular Sufi shrine, Data Darbar, in the eastern city of Lahore. Earlier in 2010, a team of gunmen and suicide bombers killed 93 people in attacks on two mosques belonging to the minority Ahmadi sect.

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## **Two Christians shot dead in Pakistan church attack**

Barnabas Fund (22.03.2011) / HRWF (24.03.2011) – <http://www.hrwf.net> - Two Christian men were shot dead in an attack on a Pakistan church by Muslim youths last night (Monday 21 March).

Father of four Yunis Ilyas (47), whose family is supported by a Barnabas Fund feeding programme, and newly-wed Jameel Masih (21) were killed on the spot during the incident at a church in Hoor Camp, Hyderabad. Two others were injured; one of them, Sadiq Masih, was transferred to a hospital in Karachi, where he is in a critical condition.

The incident started at around 6.30pm when Muslim youths began shouting vulgar abuse at Christians who were arriving for a prayer service at the church. The pastor and a number of other Christians remonstrated with the Muslim boys, but they continued insulting the Christian girls. The Muslim aggressors left the scene, but they returned shortly afterwards with pistols and fired at Christians as they were coming out of the church.

Wilson Saraj, Barnabas Fund's co-ordinator for South Asia, was in Hoor Camp earlier this month visiting the 41 Christian families – including Yunis' – in the area who receive monthly food parcels from the feeding programme. He spoke to the pastor of the grieving church today.

Mr Saraj said:

*The church and the entire community are deeply saddened by this attack and tragic loss of these two brothers in Christ. The Christian community is feeling very insecure today; they urgently need our prayers.*

The attack comes three weeks after the assassination of Minorities Minister **Shahbaz Bhatti**, a Christian who tirelessly defended the beleaguered Christian community in Pakistan. Christians are increasingly subjected to violence by hostile Islamists and suffer severe discrimination in public life. They have been feeling particularly vulnerable since the death of their advocate.

Barnabas Fund supports marginalised Pakistani Christians through various projects, including two feeding programmes. Yunis' family is among 855 very poor families throughout the country supported by one of the feeding programmes. The other programme supports another 860 Christian families who were severely affected by the disastrous floods of 2010.

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## **Christian woman freed from Muslim kidnappers**

***Captors tried to force mother of seven to convert to Islam***

By Brian Sharma

Compass Direct News (11.03.2011) / HRWF (15.03.2011) – <http://www.hrwf.net> - A Christian mother of seven here who last August was kidnapped, raped, sold into marriage and threatened with death if she did not convert to Islam was freed this week.

After she refused to convert and accept the marriage, human traffickers had threatened to kill Shaheen Bibi, 40, and throw her body into the Sindh River if her father, Manna Masih, did not pay a ransom of 100,000 rupees (US\$1,170) by Saturday (March 5), the released woman told Compass.

Drugged into unconsciousness, Shaheen Bibi said that when she awoke in Sadiqabad, her captors told her she had been sold and given in marriage.

"I asked them who they were," she said. "They said that they were Muslims, to which I told them that I was a married Christian woman with seven children, so it was impossible for me to marry someone, especially a Muslim."

Giving her a prayer rug (*musalla*), her captors – Ahmed Baksh, Muhammad Amin and Jaam Ijaz – tried to force her to convert to Islam and told her to recite a Muslim prayer, she said.

"I took the *musalla* but prayed to Jesus Christ for help," she said. "They realized that I should be returned to my family."

A member of St. Joseph Catholic Church in Lahore, Shaheen Bibi said she was kidnapped in August 2010 after she met a woman named Parveen on a bus on her way to work. She said Parveen learned where she worked and later showed up there in a car with two men identified as Muhammad Zulfiqar and Shah. They offered her a job at double her salary and took her to nearby Thokar Niaz Baig.

There she was given tea with some drug in it, and she began to fall unconscious as the two men raped her, she said. Shaheen Bibi was unconscious when they put her in a vehicle, and they gave her sedation injections whenever she regained her senses, she said.

When she awoke in Sadiqabad, Baksh, Amin and Ijaz informed her that she had been sold into marriage with Baksh. They showed her legal documents in which she was given a Muslim name, Sughran Bibi daughter of Siddiq Ali. After Baksh had twice raped her, she said, his mother interjected that she was a "persistent Christian" and that therefore he should stay away from her.

Shaheen Bibi, separated from an abusive husband who had left her for another woman, said that after Baksh's mother intervened, her captors stopped hurting her but kept her in chains.

## Release

Her father, Masih, asked police to take action, but they did nothing as her captors had taken her to a remote area between the cities of Rahim Yar Khan and Sadiqabad, considered a "no-go" area ruled by dangerous criminals.

Masih then sought legal assistance from the Community Development Initiative (CDI), a human rights affiliate of the European Center for Law & Justice. With the kidnapers giving Saturday (March 5) as a deadline for payment of the ransom, CDI attorneys brought the issue to the notice of high police officials in Lahore and on March 4 obtained urgent legal orders from Model Town Superintendent of Police Haidar Ashraf to recover Shaheen, according to a CDI source.

The order ultimately went to Assistant Sub-Inspector (ASI) Asghar Jutt of the Nashtar police station. Police accompanied by a CDI field officer raided the home of a contact person for the captors in Lahore, Naheed Bibi, the CDI source said, and officers arrested her in Awami Colony, Lahore.

With Naheed Bibi along, CDI Field Officer Haroon Tazeem and Masih accompanied five policemen, including ASI Jutt, on March 5 to Khan Baila, near Rahim Yar Khan – a journey of 370 miles, arriving that evening. Area police were not willing to cooperate and accompany them, telling them that Khan Baila was a "no-go area" they did not enter even during daytime, much less at night.

Jutt told area police that he had orders from high officials to recover Shaheen Bibi, and that he and Tazeem would lead the raid, the CDI source said. With Nashtar police also daring them to help, five local policemen decided to go with them for the operation, he said.

At midnight on Sunday (March 6), after some encounters and raids in a jungle area where houses are miles apart, the rescue team managed to get hold of Shaheen Bibi, the CDI source said. The captors handed over Shaheen Bibi on the condition that they would not be the targets of further legal action, the CDI source said.

Sensing that their foray into the danger zone had gone on long enough, Tazeem and Jutt decided to leave but told them that those who had sold Shaheen Bibi in Lahore would be brought to justice.

Fatigued and fragile when she arrived in Lahore on Monday (March 7), Shaheen Bibi told CDI through her attorneys that she would pursue legal action against those who sold her fraudulently into slavery and humiliation.

She said that she had been chained to a tree outside a house, where she prayed continually that God would help her out of the seemingly impossible situation. After the kidnapers gave her father the March 5 deadline last week, Shaheen Bibi said, at one point she lifted her eyes in prayer, saw a cross in the sky and was comforted that God's mighty hand would release her even though her father had no money to pay ransom.

On four previous occasions, she said, her captors had decided to kill her and had changed their mind.

Shaheen Bibi said there were about 10 other women in captivity with her, some whose hands or legs were broken because they had refused to be forcibly given in marriage. Among the women was one from Bangladesh who had abandoned hope of ever returning home as she had reached her 60s in captivity.



Masih told CDN that he had prayed that God would send help, as he had no money to pay the ransom. The day before the deadline for paying the ransom, he said, he had 100 rupees (less than US\$2) in his pocket.

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## **Pakistani officials back Muslim land-grabbers, Christians Say**

### ***Senior district authorities accused of supporting desecration of 150 Christian graves***

By Asher John

Compass Direct News (09.03.2011) / HRWF (10.03.2011) – <http://www.hrwf.net> - Christians in south Punjab Province are accusing senior district officials of supporting local Muslims who allegedly demolished 150 Christian graves and desecrated holy relics – and are now threatening Christians seeking legal redress.

In the Kot Addu area of Muzaffargarh district, Waseem Shakir told Compass by telephone that an influential Muslim group last Nov. 6 took illegal possession of a 1,210-square yard piece of land designated as a Christian cemetery and set up shops on it. Official records state that the portion of land was allotted as a Christian cemetery, he said.

“Local Muslims demolished 150 Christians’ graves and desecrated the cross and biblical inscriptions on the graves in a bid to construct shops on the property,” said Shakir, a resident of Chak (Village) 518, Peer Jaggi Morr, Kot Addu. “Only five marlas [151.25 square yards] are all that is left for the Christians to bury their dead now.”

Shakir said that all Muzaffargarh area authorities, including the local politicians, were supporting the alleged land-grabbers even as Christians feared a mob attack.

“The situation has come to point where even the local police have warned their higher-ups that the tension could provoke a Gojra-type incident,” he said, adding that Muslim instigators were now openly trying to intimidate him and Boota Masih, who registered a case with police, into dropping the matter.

In Gojra on Aug. 1, 2009, Muslim hordes acting on an unsubstantiated rumor of blasphemy of the Quran – and whipped into a frenzy by local imams and banned terrorist groups – killed at least seven Christians, looted more than 100 houses and set fire to 50 of them. At least 19 people were injured in the melee.

Shakir said Christians had approached police and the district administration to register a case against the Muslims for desecrating their sacred relics and hurting religious sentiments, but authorities have shown little attention to their grievance. Masih registered the complaint on behalf of area Christians, but the station house officer of the Daira Deen Panah Police, Waseem Leghari, altered it to state that Muslims had only occupied a piece of the cemetery land, Shakir said.

“Leghari registered a case against the Muslims under Section 297 of the Pakistan Penal Code [trespass of a place for the dead], which is a bailable offense, despite the fact that a case under the blasphemy law should have been registered against the Muslims for desecrating the Christian holy relics,” Shakir said.

Police took no measures to arrest the 11 named suspects, he added.

"No one seems bothered over the desecration of our cross and biblical inscriptions," Shakir said.

Section 297 of the penal code states, "Whoever, with the intention of wounding the feelings of any person, or of insulting the religion of any person, or with the knowledge that the feelings of any person are likely to be wounded, or that the religion of any person is likely to be insulted thereby, commits any trespass in any place of worship or on any place of sculpture, or any place set apart for the performance of funeral rites or as a depository for the remains of the dead, or offers any indignity to any human corpse or causes disturbance to any persons assembled for the performance of funeral ceremonies, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to one year, or with fine, or with both."

Shakir said that, besides the 150 demolished graves, the illegal occupants had thrown garbage on another 50 graves. The police's indifferent attitude towards the Christian community had been hurtful, he said, and Christians had repeatedly taken up the issue with District Police Officer (DPO) Chaudhry Manzoor and District Coordination Officer Tahir Khurshid.

They did not take the issue seriously, Shakir said.

DPO Manzoor rejected the Christians' accusations.

"It's not as serious a case as they are portraying," he told Compass. "The people who have built shops on the land are not illegal occupants but the real owners."

He said Christians were furious because the shopkeepers put some of their belongings on the graves.

"No one has desecrated any Christian holy symbol, book or grave," he said. "Any fears that the issue could lead to another Gojra are baseless."

Manzoor said the matter would be resolved amicably.

Napoleon Qayyum, leader of the Minorities Wing of the ruling Pakistan People's Party (PPP), told Compass that open desecration of the Christian symbols and places and the police's alleged support of the culprits showed the prejudice of the Punjab government towards minority groups.

"An application regarding this incident is lying in the Punjab chief minister's secretariat, but it seems the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz's [PML-N] government in Punjab wants another Gojra-like incident to take place in Kot Addu," he said, adding that it was curious that all major violence against Christians usually takes place when the PML-N is in power in the province.

Qayyum said that he had taken up the matter with the PPP leadership.

"It's a case of blasphemy, and the culprits should have been rounded up under Section 295-A," he said. "I have contacted Farahnaz Ispahani, the political adviser to President Asif Zardari, and she has assured me of the federal government's support in this matter."

He added that stern action against local police and administrative authorities was necessary to set an example for others.

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## **Assassinated Pakistani minister sought religious harmony**

By Abubakar Siddique

RFE/ RL (02.03.2011) / HRWF (03.03.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - The death of Shahbaz Bhatti, Pakistan's minister for religious minorities, in a drive-by shooting ended his life-long struggle for minority rights and understanding among people of different faiths in the predominantly Muslim state of 180 million.

His assassination, which followed months of personal threats, casts a long shadow over the prospects of a democratic and pluralistic Pakistan -- an ideal that the 42-year-old Catholic politician struggled for.

Two months ago, just kilometers from where Bhatti was assassinated today, fellow Pakistani People's Party stalwart and Governor of Punjab Province Salman Taseer was gunned down by his bodyguard. Both men had sought changes in Pakistan's blasphemy law.

Critics see the law as a controversial measure. Anyone accused under the law of speaking ill of Islam and the Prophet Muhammad is charged with a crime and faces the death penalty. Activists say the vague terminology has led to its misuse. Most blasphemy cases in Pakistan are intensely politicized and non-Muslim Pakistanis are live in fear of being targeted under the law.

Michelle Chaudhry, a close friend of Bhatti, says that he was committed to his life-long struggle seeking equal rights for Pakistan's minorities. She told RFE/RL's Radio Mashaal that he became an activist soon after finishing high school.

"He was totally committed to the cause, very brave. In fact just a few days ago he started receiving threatening calls," Chaudhry said.

"I told him just a few days ago, 'Shahbaz you need to hike up your security because these people are not going to stop at anything.' And he told me, 'If my God is with me and Jesus Christ is with me, no security guard can protect me more than Jesus can protect me.'"

### **'Most Committed Person'**

Bhatti hailed from a Roman Catholic family in Faisalabad, an industrial and commercial hub in eastern Punjab Province. He inherited political activism from his father and formed his own political organization, the Christian Liberation Front, which in 1985 he merged into a new coalition of non-Muslim political activists called the All-Pakistan Minorities Alliance.

Unlike many non-Muslim Pakistani politicians, Bhatti promoted the inclusion of minorities in the mainstream. He joined the current ruling Pakistani People's Party for its liberal and pluralistic credentials in 2002 and was elected to the national legislature on its ticket in 2008.

In his portfolio as the federal minister of minorities, he actively promoted interfaith harmony and understanding. About 4 percent of Pakistan's 180 million people are non-

Muslims, with Hindus the predominant group, followed by some 3 million Christians, most of whom are extremely poor.

Bhatti was recognized internationally for his work and was honored in Finland and Canada. In 2009, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom awarded him a first-of-a-kind medal.

Cecil Chaudhry is a former fighter pilot and human rights campaigner who knew Bhatti since his student days in the 1980s. He describes him as "one of the most committed persons that I have come across in my life," who sacrificed everything to end discrimination and oppression against minorities.

"He was the most vocal person in the country right now as far as the rights of minorities were concerned," Chaudhry says. "And as far as the blasphemy laws were concerned. And that's why he was targeted by the extremists."

Bhatti's killing has been widely condemned in Pakistan and internationally. He never married and left behind a family of four brothers, one sister, and an ailing mother, whom he visited every morning.

*RFE/RL's Radio Mashaal correspondent Majeed Babar contributed to this article*

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## **The brutal assassination of Minister Shahbaz Bhatti exposes the nexus between the security agencies and the Taliban**

AHRC (02.03.2011) / HRWF (03.03.2011) – <http://www.hrwf.net> - The Asian Human Rights Commission and the world at large has lost a great advocate in the cause of human rights in general and religious minorities in particular by the brutal assassination of Mr. Shahbaz Bhatti, the Federal Minister for Religious Minorities. Mr. Bhatti, the only Christian minister, was shot to death while traveling in his official car on March 2 in Islamabad exactly two months after the murder of Salman Taseer, the former governor of Punjab. The linking cause behind these two high profile assassinations was their support of the proposed amendments to the blasphemy laws.

From his early years, before he took up his ministerial duties Mr. Bhatti was a true human rights defender and activist who fought for the religious freedom of all persons. He was a humanitarian that believed in a hands-on approach to his work and was not afraid to be seen visiting, speaking to and supporting others who were fighting in their own way.

His assassination shows how barbaric the blasphemy laws really are in that they make no effort to maintain peace and order but rather encourage religious extremists who are fully aware that the government of Pakistan will take no real action against them. This was made evident by their lack of action against the pamphlets distributed by unknown persons calling for the assassination of anyone opposed to the blasphemy laws. The fact that they were distributed in the Minister's neighbourhood shows a well planned and premeditated attack on him.

The Taliban elements in Pakistan made open threats, not only against Mr. Bhatti but also against any person or persons who support the proposed amendments to the blasphemy

laws. These threats have been made publicly, but as is typical the government has not instructed the authorities to arrest and detain the people concerned. Rather they have chosen to continue their policy of appeasement which has now led to the death of another good man. Prior to his assassination Mr. Bhatti reported several death threats to the relevant authorities. In fact, on January 27, 2011 the Daily Jang, the largest circulated newspaper in the country reported that according to intelligence reports Shahbaz Bhatti would be the next target of the Taliban after Salman Taseer. It therefore speaks to the most unbelievable negligence of the police and the security agencies that no specific action was taken to provide additional security. Instead the police officer responsible for Mr. Bhatti's security, Wajid Durrani, Islamabad's police chief, has shifted the burden of responsibility on Mr. Bhatti himself by stating that the security detail was withdrawn on the Minister's instructions. A claim which he cannot support with any documentary proof.

It has been observed that in recent high profile assassinations there has been a considerable connection with the police to the perpetrators. This was plainly evident in the assassination of Salman Taseer who was shot dead in the presence of his security detail by one of his own police guards. Similarly in the case of Benazir Bhutto the police officer responsible for her security was removed by higher officials shortly before her assassination. The response to her death by the military government, then under Musharraf, was that it was her own fault for placing herself in danger.

There is an alarming nexus between the Taliban, extremist religious forces and the police and security agencies which denies the victims their right, guaranteed by the country's Constitution of protection. This nexus also ensures that no impartial investigations will ever see the light of day. Police reforms were halted during the reign of the military government and despite the fact that Pakistan is now under a civilian government the reforms have not yet started. This is because the government itself has no control over the military and security agencies. This lack of control and command responsibility has allowed militant and religious extremists to infiltrate their ranks.

Even parts of the media have been used to instigate support for religious intolerance and hatred towards supporters of amendments to the blasphemy laws and secular thinking. They have used their facilities to glorify the killers as in the case of Mumtaz Quadri, the assassin of Salman Taseer who was feted as a hero. Even the attitude of the higher courts shows no support for the amendments to the blasphemy laws in that they have given verdicts that the parliament should not continue with the amendments. They also turn a blind eye to the blatantly illegal use of mosque loud speakers to spread the messages of hatred and make no effort to implement the law which has been in existence since 2004.

The assassination of Mr. Shahbaz Bhatti, the Federal Minister for Religious Minorities, marks a dark day in the history of Pakistan. The AHRC has repeatedly called upon the government to take action against persons and groups calling for the death of anyone supporting the amendments to the blasphemy laws and to leave behind, once and for all, its appeasement policy towards the religious extremists. It is this very policy which results in the political expediency that allows the government to live in peace with the religious extremists and militant elements in the country.

The Asian Human Rights Commission calls upon the government of President Zardari to initiate an immediate and impartial investigation through an independent commission into the death of Mr. Shahbaz Bhatti. This must be done to bring justice to the many persons killed and harmed by religious intolerance and to reveal to the international community that it is the government, not the extremists or security agencies that is in charge.

The government must also take strenuous and immediate efforts to form a high powered

commission to purge the police and security agencies of the Taliban elements and religious extremists. Reforms of the policing system are the most important need of the day.

The government must also stand firm on the amendments to the blasphemy laws before more good men and women are killed while they look on. In this respect protection must be provided to Ms. Sherry Rehman, the former Minister for Information who proposed the amendments to the blasphemy law in 2010 and who is the next person on the assassination list of the Taliban.

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## **Another 24 Ahmadiya Pakistani asylum seekers, including children and pregnant women, are at risk of deportation**

AHRC (23.02.2011) / HRWF (23.02.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net>

### **Case narrative:**

In our previous appeal ([AHRC-UAC-182-2010](#)), we have already reported that 85 persons, 17 of whom have already been granted refugee status by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Bangkok, have been taken into custody of the immigration detention facilities. They are presently subject to deportation proceedings.

The AHRC has already asked the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) of Thailand to intervene urgently in this case; however, they have taken no action to assist.

On 20 February 2011, the Immigration Police in Thailand raided the houses where the 24 Ahmadiya Pakistani asylum seekers are staying in Bangkok. The group is composed of ten children, seven women--two of whom are in advanced stage of pregnancy; and seven men. They are presently detained at Pratumnani Police Station while waiting to be transferred to the Immigration Detention Center. They will be subject to deportation proceedings which are in violation of the principle of non-refoulement, which prohibits the deportation of persons back to their countries of origin where they will be at risk of persecution, torture, and death.

At the time of their arrest, the UNHCR in Bangkok had already accepted the application of asylum status of 24 individuals. Under article 3 of the Convention against Torture (CAT), of which Thailand is a State party, they have obligations not to: "expel, return ("refouler") or extradite a person to another State where there are substantial grounds to believing that he/she would be in danger of being subjected to torture".

The Ahmadiya are being prosecuted over a Draconian Ordinance in 1984 in Pakistan, banning the Ahmadiya from converting Muslims to their religion, and prohibits them from identifying themselves as Muslims. Therefore, the Ahmadiya are being subjected to deportation or extradition proceedings to send them back to Pakistan to face the charges. Several groups of detainees in Thailand are also identified as members of Ahmadiya Muslims who fled such persecution in Pakistan to seek refuge and are endlessly waiting for refugee status from UNHCR.

These raids, arbitrary arrests, detention and deportation of all irregular migrants are annually scheduled with joint efforts of Immigration authorities as authorized by the Immigration Act, B.E. 2522. These arrests and detention, however, have already resulted in the congestions of detention facilities. The detention facilities in Thailand often hold prisoners beyond its limit which result in inhumane treatment of prisoners and poor hygiene. In one recent visit it was noted that the detainees are held like "canned fish" and could not even sit at the same time.

**Suggested action:**

Please write to the persons listed below to call for the immediate release of these persons from custody and the respect of their right to seek asylum in Thailand and complete the process that they have begun with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Please be informed that the AHRC is writing separate letters to the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention and the regional human rights office for Southeast Asia concerning these detainees.

*SAMPLE LETTER:*

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

**THAILAND/PAKISTAN: Another 24 Ahmadiya Pakistani asylum seekers, including children and pregnant women, are at risk of deportation**

**Number of victims:** Twenty four individuals from Pakistan. They are composed of ten children, seven women--two of whom are in advance stage of pregnancy and seven men.

**Details of their arrests and detention:** They were illegally arrested by the Immigration Police Division, Royal Thai Police on February 20, 2011. They are presently held at the Pratamtani Police Station awaiting transfer to the Immigration Detention Center.

**Justification for deportation & extradition:** The victims are Ahmadiya Pakistani, one of the religious minorities in Pakistan. In Pakistan, Ahmadis are being prosecuted for an Ordinance promulgated in 1984 banning Ahmadis from converting Muslims into their religion and prohibits them from identifying themselves as Muslims. The deportation & extradition proceeding is done for them to face the charges in Pakistan.

I am writing to express my alarm at information I have received that Thai Immigration Police have taken into custody at least 24 persons of Pakistani Ahmadiya Muslims who have fled to and have been staying in Bangkok for the purpose only of obtaining asylum. The victims were composed of vulnerable persons--women, two of them are pregnant; and children. They are now being detained at the police station mentioned above.

According to this information, on 21 February 2011, the Immigration authorities in Thailand have raided the homes at nighttime of where these persons lived in Bangkok. These were done despite them having their application for asylum status granted by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Bangkok. Without explaining to them the reason why they are being arrested, they were taken into custody at the Pratamtani Police Station. They are expected to be transferred to the Immigration Detention Center while they are waiting for their deportation proceedings to be completed.

I am deeply concerned that the Government of Thailand openly violates its international obligations under the Convention against torture (CAT), Article 3, which prohibits

governments to deport or extradite persons to another State where they are at risk of torture, execution or persecution. The probability of these victims, including those the Immigration authorities have arrested in December 2010, to be tortured, persecuted and killed in Pakistan, once deported have already been affirmed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (OHCHR) who have accepted their application for asylum status.

In fact, 17 of those who have been in custody after their arrest in December 2010 have already obtained asylum status. Therefore, those who are seeking asylum, whose applications are still pending, have reason to believe that they would be subject to torture once deported. I urge the Government of Thailand to comply with its obligations under the CAT to refrain from using Immigration laws on victims facing these tremendous difficulties to survive by forcing them back to Pakistan.

Also, I am concerned by the overcrowding and poor hygienic conditions of the detention facilities in police stations where these victims are held. According to the report of one person who visited the facility recently, detainees are held like "canned fish". There was not even enough room for everyone to sit at the same time, let alone to lie down or move about at all.

I am appalled to hear that children and pregnant women especially are being held in such circumstances, and I am aware that aside from this group there are other women and children being held in the atrocious conditions at this facility: according to a report by a recent visitor to the detention centre, there are at least five women in advanced stages of pregnancy, from Sri Lanka and Pakistan, locked up there at present.

In light of the above, I call for the immediate release of these persons and for them to be allowed to remain in Thailand pending the outcomes of their applications for asylum. I call for appropriate medical treatment to be given to the sick and pregnant among them, and for the concerned authorities to take other measures as necessary for their security and wellbeing.

In this regard I draw the attention of the Government of Thailand to comply with its obligations under international laws, particularly under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the Convention against Torture (CAT).

Yours sincerely,

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PLEASE SEND YOUR LETTERS TO:

1. Mr. Abhisit Vejjajiva  
Prime Minister  
c/o Government House  
Pitsanulok Road, Dusit District  
Bangkok 10300  
THAILAND  
Fax: +66 2 288 4000 ext. 4025  
Tel: +66 2 288 4000  
E-mail: [spokesman@thaigov.go.th](mailto:spokesman@thaigov.go.th) or [abhisit@abhisit.org](mailto:abhisit@abhisit.org)

2. Mr. Chaowarat Chanweerakul  
Minister of Interior  
Office of the Ministry of Interior  
Atsadang Road, Ratchabophit  
Pranakorn, Bangkok 10200



THAILAND

Fax: +66 2 226 4371/ 222 8866

Tel: +66 2 224 6320/ 6341

E-mail: om@moi.go.th

3. Mr. Peeraphan Saleeratwipak  
Minister of Justice  
Office of the Ministry of Justice  
Ministry of Justice Building  
22nd Floor Software Park Building,  
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THAILAND

Fax: +662 502 6734 / 6884

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4. Mr. Kasit Piromya  
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Office of the Minister of Foreign Affairs  
443 Sri Ayudhya Road  
Bangkok 10400

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Fax: +662 643 5318

Tel: +662 643 5333

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5. Mr. Jullasingha Wasantasingha  
Attorney General  
Office of the Attorney General  
Lukmuang Building, Nahuppei Road  
Prabaromrachawang, Pranakorn,  
Bangkok 10200

THAILAND

Fax: +662 224 0162/ 1448/ 221 0858

Tel: +662 224 1563/ 222 8121-30

E-mail: ag@ago.go.th or oag@ago.go.th

6. Pol. Gen. Wichan Potephosree  
Royal Thai Police  
1st Bldg, 7th Floor  
Rama I, Patumwan  
Bkk 10330

THAILAND

Fax: +66 2 251 5956/ 205 3738/ 255 1975-8

E-mail: feedback@police.go.th

7. Mr. Asif Ali Zardari  
President of Pakistan  
President's Secretariat  
Islamabad  
PAKISTAN  
Tel: +92 51 9204801/9214171  
Fax: +92 51 9207458  
Email: publicmail@president.gov.pk

8. Mr. Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani

Prime Minister of Pakistan  
Prime Minister House  
Islamabad  
PAKISTAN  
Fax: + 92 51 9221596  
E-mail: secretary@cabinet.gov.pk

9. Mr. Syed Mumtaz Alam Gillani  
Federal Minister for Human Rights  
Ministry of Human Rights  
Old US Aid building  
Ata Turk Avenue  
G-5, Islamabad  
PAKISTAN  
Fax: +9251-9204108  
Email: sarfaraz\_yousuf@yahoo.com

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## **Balochistan: Hindu families victim of abductions and targeted killings**

by Jibran Khan

Asianews. (07.02.2011) / HRWF (08.02.2011) – <http://www.hrwf.net> - A group of armed men kill a merchant during a botched kidnapping attempt. An 85-year-old Hindu religious leader has been missing for more than month. In the Pakistani province, more than 100 groups are involved in kidnappings. Last year, 86 kidnappings took place.

Provincial authorities in Balochistan and Sindh have pledged greater security for minority Hindus but have failed to stop the violence. In fact, abductions have doubled in the past year.

In Quetta, three merchants have been murdered, and mystery still shrouds the kidnapping of a local Hindu leader more than a month ago.

A few days ago, Eam Singh Sodho, a Hindu member of the Sindh legislature for the Pakistan Muslim League (Q), resigned and fled to India where he applied for refugee status, after receiving death threats.

A merchant was killed in Quetta yesterday during an attempted kidnapping, an all too common event in the area that has forced entire families to flee.

The abduction of 85-year-old Hindu priest Maharaj Sain Lakmee Geer, who had held his religious office since 1946 in Balochistan, has raised fears among Pakistani Hindus, leaving many with no option but to migrate to India.

"As many as 27 Hindu families from Balochistan have sent applications to the Indian embassy for asylum," disclosed the regional director for the federal Ministry of Human Rights, Saeed Ahmed Khan.

Over 100 groups involved in kidnappings Hindus for ransom are operating in Balochistan. As many as 86 cases of abductions were registered in 2010 compared to 43 in 2009.

Members of the Balochi Hindu community have been compelled to lodge strong protest. Many protested, shouting slogans like "Provide us protection or allow us to migrate".

Balochistan is home to more than 100,000 Hindus who have lived there for centuries. Now, they are increasingly feeling insecure.

When Pakistan was founded, many Hindus chose to move to India. Tens of thousands decided instead to stay in their native land.

Now, with rising religious fanaticism and widespread poverty, many of those who stayed behind complain about the lack of security and want to leave.

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## **Prime Minister of Pakistan rejects Pope's call on Islamic blasphemy laws**

By Aftab Alexander Mughal

Minority Concern (12.01.2011) / HRWF (13.01.2011) – <http://www.hrwf.net> - Pope Benedict XVI's call on Jan. 10 for Pakistan to repeal its Islamic blasphemy laws was rejected by Pakistan's Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani on Jan. 11. Prime Minister Gilani once again reiterated his government's stance that there would be no amendments to the blasphemy law.

While the pope was speaking in an annual address to diplomats he urged Pakistan to repeal contentious blasphemy laws as he called on governments worldwide to do more to enable Christians to practice their faith without violence, intolerance or restriction.

Pope's was criticized by radical Islamic organisations in Pakistan. They term it interference in the internal affairs of Pakistan. "The Pontiff's statement is a bid to plunge the entire world into a deadly war," Liaquat Baloch, the General Secretary of Jamait-e-Islamic (JI) said. Baloch also wants people to learn a lesson from Governor of Punjab Salman Taseer's murder.

Mr. Taseer, a Muslim, was killed by his own Muslim gunman on Jan. 4 in Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan, because of his support to poor Christian women Asia Noreen, 45, who was awarded death sentence by a Pakistani court under controversial blasphemy laws.

Pakistan's Christians are the descendants of Hindus or Muslims converted by missionaries. They say they are treated as second-class citizens and feel insecure for several reasons, including the blasphemy laws and regular militant attacks on their churches.

After Taseer's assassination, the security of Noreen has been increased. Her family has gone into hiding, fearing they may be killed in the same way.

On Jan. 9, around 25,000 members of Islamic parties gathered in Karachi, Pakistan's largest city with 20 million inhabitants. The speakers of the rally announced that anyone showing support for the amendments to the blasphemy laws should face the same fate as Taseer. "No officer of the law enforcement agencies or government officials including at least 3,000 members of the police, who were present at the meeting area, moved to silence them or did not take any action despite such death threat, was made in in public." Asian Human Rights Commission observed.

Muttahida Quami Movement leader Altaf Hussain has said on Jan. 11 that neither the Muslims nor the minorities of the country could think of blaspheming the Holy Prophet (PBUH). "I appeal to religious leaders of all sects to stop their demonstrations after

getting assurance from Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani that the blasphemy law would not be changed," said Altaf Hussain.

In some other cities the rallies were lead and addressed by the banned Islamist group Jamaat ud Dawa but no action was taken by the state. During these rallies, Malik Mumtaz Qadri, the killer of the Governor, was declared hero.

Although after Taseer's murder Christians have been living under constant fear, they paid tributes to Taseer during Sunday worship services throughout the country and declared him 'Shaheed-e-Haq'. Church of Pakistan Bishop Alexander John Malik of Lahore said, "He was a voice for the oppressed section of society." Christians are of the opinion that now the space is shrinking for liberal views in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. Pakistan's public culture is riddled with hard-line views, from the school curriculum to the TV talk shows. The Islamists also gaining much ground in the country which is moving to radicalism.

A senior journalist Rahimullah Yusufzai writes in his column on Jan. 11, "The situation has changed after Taseer's tragic assassination. The country is more polarized than before and a dispassionate discussion on any issue, particularly those concerning religion, has become difficult and even dangerous."

"If a bodyguard can kill a governor, a high profile person, what can happen to me?," asked Christian activist Shahzad Kamran. Kamran has stopped visiting Bibi in jail for fear of his life, the news agency Reuter reported.

The Economist, a weekly from London, observed that religious parties do not attract much support at election time—they polled less than 5% of votes in the last ballot, in 2008.

"Over time, Pakistani society has drifted toward religious extremism," said Hasan Askari Rizvi, a political and defence analyst from Lahore. "This religious sentiment has seeped deep into government circles and into the army and police at lower levels," Rizvi told daily the New York Times.

An extremist mind set has infiltrated state agencies, from the sensitive to the less sensitive, and the governments of the day and their large, unwieldy bureaucracies can do nothing in the face of this ideological onslaught, writes Raza Rumi in his column. According to Reuters, Muslim prison guard Ansaar Jameel, at the Sheikhpura prison where Noreen is held, said "What happened was justified."

The blasphemy law is bad enough in itself, but it also gives official sanction to a growing atmosphere of religious intolerance in Pakistan. "It is generally held that Islam prescribes capital punishment for those who commit blasphemy; that is, using abusive language against the Prophet of Islam. But this is quite untrue. According to Islam, blasphemy is simply a misuse of freedom and not a cognisable offence; the blasphemer is not liable to incur legal punishment," India Muslim scholar Maulana Wahiduddin Khan said recently.

Ironically, leading lawyer Chaudhry Aitzaz Ahsan from the ruling party, PPP, said the blasphemy law should remain intact. Taseer was from the same party.

The Punjab government is reluctant to arrest Mufti Mohammad Hanif Qureshi Qadri, a Barelvi cleric from Rawalpindi, twin city of Islamabad, who is considered to be the inspirational guide of Qadri, the killer. Punjab government of Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz Group), who has closed association with hard line Islamic groups, has released another Al Qaeda-linked militant Qari Saifullah Akhtar on Jan. 10.

After Taseer, Sherry Rehman, a Muslim member of parliament, is on the hit list because she has presented a private bill in the parliament to review the blasphemy laws. According to Daily Times, the imam of Sultan Masjid has issued a fatwa (Islamic religious decree) and another has been published in a pamphlet and distributed by the Tanzeem-e-Islami (TI) against Pakistan People's Party (PPP) leader Rehman, declaring her a non-Muslim and demanding death sentence for her. Around 60 Christian and Muslim organisations in Karachi condemn the threats to Rehman.

If Pakistan has to progress, it has to establish itself as a true democracy. No democracy is complete if it is not secular. Does that mean that 97 per cent Muslim Pakistanis will lose their faith? No, not at all. In a secular dispensation they are free to believe what they want. The difference is that they cannot impose their thinking or their brand of shariah on others, a Muslim intellectual Babar Ayaz believed.

Aftab Alexander Mughal - Editor of Minorities Concern of Pakistan.

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## **Punjab court sentences blasphemers**

UPI (12.01.2011) / HRWF (13.01.2011) – <http://www.hrwf.net> - An anti-terrorism court in Pakistan's Punjab province sentenced a Muslim cleric and his son to life in prison for blasphemy.

Mohammad Shafi, 45, and Mohammad Aslam, 20, were accused of tearing down and trampling a poster of a gathering to mark the birthday of the Prophet Mohammed. They were arrested last April for the offense that happened outside a grocery store.

The judge in the court at Dera Ghazi Khan in the eastern part of the Punjab also fined them each the equivalent of \$2,700.

The sentences come after Punjab Provincial governor Salman Taseer, 64, was assassinated allegedly by one of his bodyguards who claimed he shot Taseer because of his public remarks against the blasphemy laws.

Taseer was getting into his car in the fashionable Koshar Market in Islamabad in the early afternoon when he was shot several times at point-blank range.

The veteran politician's death focused public attention on the blasphemy laws that dictate harsh sentences for transgressors. Nearly 97 percent of Pakistan's 175 million people are Muslim while less than 2 percent -- fewer than 3 million -- are Christian.

Religious tensions have been rising in Pakistan in the past several years and resulted in Muslim extremist groups openly attacking Christians.

In July, two Christian brothers accused of writing a pamphlet critical of the Prophet Mohammed were killed as they left a courthouse under armed police guard in Faisalabad. Opposition parties have expressed concern that the government hasn't indicated it will reform the laws.

Many public rallies have taken place in the past year, organized by Muslim clerics, in support of the laws and against any reforms of them.

Taseer, who championed reforming the laws that in some cases specify death for blasphemers, supported a Christian woman awaiting execution for blasphemy. Asia Bibi was sentenced to hang in public for allegedly insulting the Prophet Mohammed during an argument with other farmhands in a Punjab village in June 2009.

Bibi, 45, is an illiterate farm worker in the Punjab, is married to another laborer and they have five children. She is the first woman to be sentenced to death under the blasphemy law but no date for execution has been set.

Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari can pardon Bibi. But he ordered a review of the case after an international outcry -- including from the pope -- over the death sentence.

Arif Gurmani, defense counsel for the convicted father and son blasphemers, said he would take the case to the high court because "it has been given in haste" and was the result of inter-faith rivalries.

"Both are Muslim. The case is the result of differences between Deobandi and Barelvi sects," he said. The accuser, Haji Phool Muhammad, belongs to the Barelvi sect while Shafi and Aslam belong to the Deobandi sect.

"Shafi is a practicing Muslim, he is the imam of a mosque and he had recently returned from a pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia ... I am defending them because I am convinced they are not guilty of blasphemy," he said.

However, Haji Phool Muhammad told The Express Tribune newspaper that he thought the two should have been given death sentences.

Chairman of the Pakistan Peoples Party, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, vowed to defend all vulnerable sections of society.

"To those who dare attack my religion, especially those who corrupt its peaceful message, are what I call covert culprits and you will be defeated," he said at a meeting in the Pakistani High Commission -- embassy -- in London.

"This shall be our jihad. Jihad against those who use our religion as a tool to justify their violence, suicide attacks and mass murder. They believe erroneously that their crimes will take them to heaven."

The death of Taseer, a veteran member of the Pakistan Peoples Party, follows that of Bilawal's mother, former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, and leader of the PPP. She was killed in a suicide attack when leaving an election rally in the city of Rawalpindi in December 2007.

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## **Islamists rally for Pakistan's blasphemy laws**

The Wall Street Journal (10.01.2011) / HRWF (17.01.2011) - <http://www.hrwf.net> - Tens of thousands of Islamists rallied Sunday in Pakistan's southern port city of Karachi in support of the nation's controversial blasphemy laws, and clerics threatened to kill anyone who challenged them.

Security was tightened around the house of Sherry Rehman, a former federal minister, who was threatened with death by radical clerics for moving a bill in the parliament last month to amend the blasphemy laws, which currently sentence to death anyone found guilty of insulting Islam.

The blasphemy laws have been in the spotlight since the murder last week of Salmaan Taseer, governor of Punjab province and a critic of the laws, who was shot by a member of his security detail. The shooter, Mumtaz Qadri, later said he killed Mr. Taseer because of the politician's opposition to the laws. Mr. Taseer was a member of the Pakistan

People's Party, which runs the governing coalition, and was close to President Asif Ali Zardari.

The killing highlighted the extent to which extremist Islam has permeated Pakistan's middle class and those close to the political elite even as the country grapples with an insurgency from the Pakistan Taliban and other violent Islamist groups. And it has deepened the polarization between moderate and radical Muslims throughout Pakistan. Radical clerics have seized the opportunity to whip up a campaign against moderate and progressive politicians, intellectuals and journalists.

Speakers at the Karachi rally sought to justify Mr. Taseer's assassination, saying the killer fulfilled his obligation as a Muslim. "We will defend the assassin in the court," declared Fazalur Rehman, the leader of Jamiat-e-Ulema Islam, a radical Islamic group that recently quit the coalition government after one of its ministers was sacked after publicly accusing a cabinet colleague of corruption.

The rally was organized by an alliance of hard-line Islamic groups including Jamaat-ud-Dawa, which the United Nations has said acts as a front for the outlawed terror group Lashkar-e-Taiba. Lashkar-e-Taiba is accused of masterminding the November 2008 terrorist attacks on Mumbai, which left more than 160 dead. Many demonstrators Sunday carried portraits of Mr. Qadri, who killed Mr. Taseer in a fashionable shopping district of Islamabad. Mr. Qadri has been hailed by Islamists as a great Islamic warrior.

Mr. Taseer had provoked the ire of radical clerics for publicly supporting a Christian woman who has been sentenced to death by a Pakistani court for allegedly making derogatory remarks against Islam's prophet. The controversial laws have often been used against Christians and other non-Muslim communities, something that Ms. Rehman is seeking to prevent with a private bill she introduced last month.

A cleric of the Sultan Mosque in Karachi in his sermon on Friday called Ms. Rehman an "infidel" for suggesting changes in the blasphemy laws. A pamphlet signed by several Islamic clerics named her for supporting blasphemy. And some hard-line clerics have issued a "fatwa" demanding death to Ms. Rehman, a senior member of parliament of the Pakistan People's Party.

Ms. Rehman said she is under pressure from the administration to leave the country until the situation calms down. "I am not going anywhere and [will] face the threat," she said in a telephone interview.

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## **Murder of governor in Pakistan darkens 'blasphemy' case**

***Assassination called a blow to prospects of justice for Christian mother on death row***

By Asher John

Compass Direct UPI (05.01.2011) / HRWF (06.01.2011) – <http://www.hrwf.net> - The case of Asia Noreen, the first Christian woman sentenced to death in Pakistan on blasphemy charges, suffered a major setback when her most vocal supporter, the governor of Punjab Province, was gunned down by one of his police bodyguards yesterday (Jan. 4) in Islamabad.

The lives of Noreen and Gov. Salman Taseer were at risk since the day he, his wife and daughter visited her in the Sheikhpura District Jail on Nov. 22, after news of her conviction appeared in the media.

Taseer had openly criticized the blasphemy statutes and vowed to try to repeal the "black laws" in parliament. He also promised Noreen (also called Asia Bibi) that he would recommend a presidential pardon for her.

The governor's assurance and his support for Noreen gave new hope to the impoverished mother of two children and step-mother to three others – and drew violent condemnation from Islamist forces, sparking countrywide protests.

"The governor's visit gave us hope that all was not lost," Sohail Johnson of Sharing Life Ministries Pakistan, which has pursued Noreen's case from the onset, told Compass. "We believed that God had sent the governor to help us ... his words of support boosted Noreen's morale, and she was actually quite optimistic about the outcome of her appeal in the high court."

He said the murder of Taseer in broad daylight had shocked all those opposing the blasphemy laws, and that "there is little hope of these laws ever being repealed."

Johnson confirmed that Noreen's life was at high risk ever since the governor had highlighted her case.

"The local Islamist forces believed that President [Asif Ali] Zardari would pardon Noreen on Taseer's recommendation, and this was unacceptable to them," said Johnson, confirming that intelligence agencies had determined that Islamists had plotted to kill Noreen inside jail to make an example of her. "Noreen was earlier allowed two hours in the morning and two in the evening to go outside her cell to relax. After the intelligence information, the jail authorities restricted her movement, and now she is kept in the cell at all times. A security guard has also been deployed with her."

He added that news of the assassination of the governor would surely panic the Christian woman.

Johnson said Noreen's appeal of her conviction had yet to be taken up for hearing by the Lahore High Court, but that the murder would definitely affect the course of justice. "The governor's brutal murder has diminished our hopes for justice for Noreen," he said.

Her family, he said, has been in hiding since Islamist parties started protests in favor of the blasphemy laws.

"Even I am keeping a low profile these days," Johnson said.

Taseer and Noreen were declared "Wajibul Qatil" (liable to be killed) by radical Islamic clerics. A cleric in Peshawar and a local politician in Multan offered a combined sum of 50 million rupees (US\$579,300) for anyone who killed Taseer and Noreen.

Protests, shut-down strikes and general uproar pressured Pakistan's federal government to announce that the blasphemy laws would not be repealed.

Taseer, however, continued to publicly vent his opposition – even using Twitter – to the blasphemy laws, which effectively mandate death for anyone convicted of insulting Muhammad, the prophet of Islam. Although courts typically overturn convictions, and no executions have been carried out, rights activists say the laws are used to settle rivalries and persecute religious minorities.

On Friday (Dec. 31), Taseer had tweeted "I was under huge pressure 2 cow down b4 rightest pressure on blasphemy. Refused. Even if I'm the last man standing."



The assassination is significant not simply because of the person targeted and the reason behind it, but because of the broader societal implications.

"[It points to] the presence of radical elements inside the Pakistani state apparatus," said columnist Cyril Almeida.

He said that the fact that Taseer's own bodyguard shot him is not just worrying because it indicates a failure of the vetting process but because it points to "the extent to which this poison has affected the Pakistani state. The investment in jihad has come home to roost."

In the hours immediately following the killing, television anchors hosted several shows in which guests, while stopping short of openly supporting the murder of Taseer, did speak out in support of killing those deemed to have blasphemed. Some Pakistanis have reported that they received text messages on their mobile phones praising the assassination.

Pakistan Interior Minister Rehman Malik has said the guard, Malik Mumtaz Hussein Qadri, told police that he killed Taseer because of the governor's opposition to Pakistan's blasphemy laws. Qadri had escorted the governor from Rawalpindi to Islamabad on Tuesday (Jan. 4).

A 26-year-old policeman from Barakhao on the outskirts of Islamabad, Qadri had reportedly transferred to the Elite Force after commando training in 2008. Thus far, he has not been identified as a member of any violent Muslim extremist groups but is considered devout in his faith.

Noreen was convicted under Section 295-C of the defamation statutes for alleged derogatory comments about Muhammad, which is punishable by death, though life imprisonment is also possible. Section 295-B makes willful desecration of the Quran or a use of its extract in a derogatory manner punishable with life imprisonment. Section 295-A of the defamation law prohibits injuring or defiling places of worship and "acts intended to outrage religious feelings of any class of citizens." It is punishable by life imprisonment, which in Pakistan is 25 years.

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