

URGENT ACTION

PAKISTANI CHRISTIAN WOMAN SENTENCED TO DEATH

Aasia Bibi, a Pakistani Christian woman, has been sentenced to death under the country's blasphemy laws.

On 8 November, the 45-year-old mother of five children was found guilty of blasphemy and sentenced to death under Section 295B and 295C of Pakistan's Penal Code, for insulting the Prophet Muhammad, by a court in Nankana, around 75km (45 miles) west of the city of Lahore in Punjab province.

Aasia Bibi, a resident of Ittanwali, was arrested in June 2009. She was working as a farm labourer and was asked by a village elder's wife to fetch drinking water. Some other female Muslim farmhands reportedly refused to drink the water, saying it was sacrilegious and "unclean" to accept water from Aasia Bibi, as a non-Muslim. Aasia Bibi took offence, reportedly saying: "are we not human?" which led to an argument between them. The women allegedly complained to Qari Salim, the local cleric, that Aasia Bibi had made derogatory remarks about the Prophet Muhammad. The cleric informed local police who arrested and charged her with insulting the Prophet Muhammad.

Aasia Bibi denies the allegations and her husband, Ashiq Masih, claims her conviction was based on "false accusations". However, the trial judge, Naveed Iqbal, "totally ruled out" the possibility of false charges and said that there were "no mitigating circumstances". Aasia Bibi has now filed an appeal against the judgment in the Lahore High Court. She has been detained in prison and held in isolation since June 2009. She has claimed that she has not had access to a lawyer during her detention and the final day of her trial.

PLEASE WRITE IMMEDIATELY in English, Urdu or your own language:

- calling on President Zardari to commute the death sentence use his powers under Article 45 of the Constitution;
- calling for the immediate release of Aasia Bibi, unless she is charged with internationally recognizable offences and tried in proceedings and under laws that meet international human rights standards;
- calling on the authorities to take immediate measures to guarantee the safety of Aasia Bibi and her family;
- expressing concern that the blasphemy laws are used indiscriminately against religious minorities and Muslims alike, and urging the government to amend or abolish laws, particularly section 295C of the Pakistan Penal Code which carries the death penalty for anyone found guilty of blasphemy; and
- calling on the Supreme Court of Pakistan to take *Suo Moto* notice of the case;
- urging the government to fulfil its pledge to review and improve "laws detrimental to religious harmony", announced by Prime Minister Giliani in August 2009;
- calling for an immediate moratorium on all executions in the country, in line with the worldwide trends to abolish the death penalty with a view to an eventual abolition of the death penalty.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 29 DECEMBER 2010 TO:

President Zardari
Pakistan Secretariat, Islamabad,
Pakistan
Fax: +92-51-9207458
E-mail: publicmail@president.gov.pk

Salutation: Dear President Zardari

Dr. Zaheeruddin Babar Awan
Federal Minister
Ministry of Law, Justice &
Parliamentary Affairs
Room 305, S-Block,
Pakistan Secretariat, Islamabad,
Pakistan
Fax: +92 51 9202628
E-Mail: minister@molaw.gov.pk
Salutation: Dear Minister

And copies to:

Justice Iftikhar Muhammad
Chaudhry
Chief Justice of Pakistan
Supreme Court of Pakistan
Islamabad, Pakistan
Fax: +92-51-9213452
**Salutation: Dear Chief Justice
Chaudhry**

Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The blasphemy laws introduced in 1982 and 1986, while purporting to protect Islam and religious sensitivities of the Muslim majority, are vaguely formulated and arbitrarily enforced by the police and judiciary in a way which amounts to harassment and persecution of religious minorities and Muslims alike. Accusations of blasphemy have sometimes resulted in the murder of both Muslims and members of religious minorities.

Evidence from Amnesty International and other human rights groups suggests that charges brought against individuals under the blasphemy laws are founded solely on the individuals' minority religious beliefs or unfounded malicious accusations stemming from personal enmity, often with the motivation to imprison people to gain advantage in business or land disputes. Police frequently fail to record and investigate complaints and justice is impeded by the biased attitude of some judges against religious minorities.

Many of those accused or suspected of blasphemy have been assaulted or tortured. Some people detained on blasphemy charges in prisons have been killed by fellow detainees or prison wardens. Others suspected of blasphemy, but not under arrest, have been unlawfully killed without police taking any action to protect them.

"Defiling the name of the Prophet Mohammed" is a capital offence under Section 295C of the Pakistan Penal Code, which states, "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 a fine". The Federal Shariat Court, whose tasks include reviewing laws to ensure they conform with Islamic doctrine, ruled in 1991 that anyone convicted of blasphemy should face the death penalty, not life imprisonment.

Articles 18 and 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights set out that everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion, opinion and expression. International human rights law provides that any limitations placed on these freedoms should be only such as are prescribed by law as well as being necessary and proportionate for, among other things, the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

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