



**JUBILEE CAMPAIGN  
ECOSOC Special Consultative Status (2003)**

**Submission to the United Nations Human Rights Committee regarding  
The Islamic Republic of Pakistan  
For the 139th Session  
9 October - 3 November 2023  
LIST OF ISSUES**

Submission by  
Jubilee Campaign

With:  
Set My People Free  
Voice For Justice

Jubilee Campaign is a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council since 2003. Our work focuses on promoting the rights of religious and ethnic minorities and raising the status of vulnerable women and children - to protect them from bodily harm and exploitation.

## I. Introduction

Jubilee Campaign, in special consultative status with ECOSOC, and in collaboration with Set My People Free and Voice for Justice, submits this analysis of religious freedom and human rights in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan as a contribution to the List of Issues in advance of the Human Rights Committee's 139th Session in October and November 2023.

## II. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights<sup>1</sup> - Articles Relevant to Present Submission

### Article 6(1)

*Every human being has the inherent right to life. This right shall be protected by law. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his life.*

The Human Rights Committee in its General Comment No. 36 (2019)<sup>2</sup> further elaborates:

*20. States parties must enact a protective legal framework that includes effective criminal prohibitions on all manifestations of violence or incitement to violence that are likely to result in deprivation of life, such as intentional and negligent homicide, unnecessary or disproportionate use of firearms, infanticide, "honour" killings, lynching, violent hate crimes, blood feuds, ritual killings, death threats and terrorist attacks. The criminal sanctions attached to these crimes must be commensurate with their gravity, while remaining compatible with all the provisions of the Covenant.*

*23. The duty to protect the right to life requires States parties to take special measures of protection towards persons in vulnerable situations whose lives have been placed at particular risk because of specific threats or pre-existing patterns of violence. Such persons include [...] victims of domestic and gender-based violence [...] members of ethnic and religious minorities [...] States parties must respond urgently and effectively in order to protect individuals who find themselves under a specific threat, by adopting special measures such as the assignment of around-the-clock police protection, the issuance of protection and restraining orders against potential aggressors and, in exceptional cases, and only with the free and informed consent of the threatened individual, protective custody.*

### Article 7

*No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. In particular, no one shall be subjected without his free consent to medical or scientific experimentation.*

The Human Rights Committee in its General Comment No. 20 (1992)<sup>3</sup> further elaborates:

*1. The aim of the provisions of article 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights is to protect both the dignity and physical and mental integrity of the individual. It is the duty of the State party to afford everyone protection through legislative and other measures as may be necessary against the acts prohibited by article 7, whether inflicted by people acting in their official capacity, outside their official capacity, or in a private capacity.*

### Article 18

---

<sup>1</sup> UN General Assembly, [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#), 16 December 1966, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 999, p. 171.

<sup>2</sup> UN Human Rights Committee, *General Comment No. 36*, [CCPR/C/GC/36](#), 3 September 2019.

<sup>3</sup> UN Human Rights Committee, *General Comment No. 20*, [HRI/GEN/1/Rev.9 \(Vol. I\)](#), 10 March 1992.

*Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.*

*No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice.*

*Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.*

The Human Rights Committee in its General Comment No. 22 (1993)<sup>4</sup> further elaborates:

*The measures contemplated by article 20, paragraph 2 of the Covenant constitute important safeguards against infringement of the rights of religious minorities and of other religious groups to exercise the rights guaranteed by articles 18 and 27, and against acts of violence or persecution directed towards those groups. The Committee wishes to be informed of measures taken by States Parties concerned to protect the practices of all religions or beliefs from infringement and to protect their followers from discrimination.*

### **Article 19 (1; 2)**

*Everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference.*

*Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice.*

The Human Rights Committee in its General Comment No. 34 (2011)<sup>5</sup> further elaborates:

*48. Prohibitions of displays of lack of respect for a religion or other belief system, including blasphemy laws, are incompatible with the Covenant. Thus, for instance, it would be impermissible for any such laws to discriminate in favour or against one or certain religions or belief systems, or their adherents over another, or religious believers over non-believers. Nor would it be permissible for any such prohibitions to be used to prevent or punish criticism of religious leaders or commentary on religious doctrine and tenets of faith.*

### **III. Freedom of thought, conscience (Article 18), and religion, as it relates to freedom of expression, opinion (Article 19); freedom from torture (Article 7); and freedom from arbitrary deprivation of life**

Pakistan's Penal Code of 1860 includes an entire chapter regarding "offenses relating to religion" which were modeled after British colonial laws to prevent religious violence. Articles 295 through 298 criminalize acts including "injuring or defiling a place of worship, with intent to insult the religion of any class"; "deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings of any class"; "defiling, etc., of copy of Holy Quran"; "use of derogatory remarks, etc., in respect of the Holy Prophet"; "disturbing religious assembly"; "trespassing on burial places"; and "uttering words, etc., with deliberate intent to wound religious feelings".<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> UN Human Rights Committee, *General Comment No. 22*, [CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.4](#), 30 July 1993.

<sup>5</sup> UN Human Rights Committee, *General Comment No. 34*, [CCPR/C/GC/34](#), 12 September 2011.

<sup>6</sup> [Pakistan: Penal Code \[Pakistan\], Act No. XLV](#), 6 October 1860.

In 1991, the Federal Sharia Court ruled that the punishment for the above offenses should be made harsher, and Article 294-C was amended to make the death penalty mandatory for individuals convicted of insulting the Prophet.<sup>7</sup>

In January 2023, the Parliament of Pakistan voted to expand the nation's blasphemy laws to include a term of imprisonment between ten years to life for any individual convicted for allegedly insulting any person connected to the Prophet, such as his companions, wives, and relatives. The sentence additionally imposes a fine of one million Pakistani Rupees and "makes the charge of blasphemy an offense for which bail is not possible".<sup>8</sup>

In its December 2022 State party report to the Human Rights Committee<sup>9</sup>, Pakistan states that "63. ICCPR allows capital punishment but under certain limitations. Article 6 of the said Covenant states that in countries, which have not abolished the death penalty, [the] death sentence may be imposed only for the most serious crimes. There is no international consensus on the definition of 'most serious crimes'". However, Pakistan fails to consider the Committee's previous remarks in its August 2017 concluding observations<sup>10</sup> that:

*"17. The Committee notes with concern that the State party lifted its moratorium on the death penalty in December 2014 and that, since then, it has been one of the States with the highest rates of executions. It is particularly concerned that the death penalty is applied to crimes other than the "most serious crimes" within the meaning of article 6(2) of the Covenant, such as drug trafficking and blasphemy;"*

*"18. If the death penalty is maintained, the State party should, as a matter of priority, take all measures necessary to ensure: (a) the death penalty is provided only for the "most serious crimes" involving intentional killing;"*

Additionally, the Human Rights Council and the United Nations Secretary General have both repeatedly made the following considerations with regards to the applicability and appropriateness of capital punishment:

*"A number of States have expanded the application of the death penalty to behavior and conduct the criminalization of which may already be in breach of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, such as adultery, consensual same-sex relations, blasphemy and apostasy. Implementation of such cases could thus constitute arbitrary deprivation of life."<sup>11</sup>*

*"The death penalty should never be imposed as a sanction for non-violent conduct such as apostasy, blasphemy, witchcraft, adultery and same-sex relations."<sup>12</sup>*

Notwithstanding these clarifications as regards what constitutes "most serious crimes" - notably violent conduct resulting in loss of life - Pakistan has continued to impose death sentences for alleged blasphemy:

September 2001 - present	In September 2001 authorities arrested Christian man <i>Anwar Kenneth</i> after he had been accused of providing an objectionable and blasphemous response to Muslim religious cleric Haji Mehmood Zafar who had sent Kenneth a letter wherein he asked questions about the Christian faith and expressed that, while he believes Jesus was a prophet, he
--------------------------	---

<sup>7</sup> Jubilee Campaign, [Human Rights Abuses Committed in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan: Submission to the United Nations Universal Periodic Review](#), November 2017.

<sup>8</sup> Salman Masood, ["Pakistan Strengthens Already Harsh Laws Against Blasphemy"](#), *The New York Times*, 22 January 2023.

<sup>9</sup> [Pakistan], *Second periodic report submitted by Pakistan under article 40 of the Covenant, due in 2020*, [CCPR/C/PAK/2](#), UN Human Rights Committee, 7 December 2022.

<sup>10</sup> UN Human Rights Committee, *Concluding observations on the initial report of Pakistan*, [CCPR/C/PAK/CO/1](#), 23 August 2017.

<sup>11</sup> Human Rights Council, *Capital punishment and the implementation of the safeguards guaranteeing protection of the rights of those facing the death penalty*, [A/HRC/42/28](#), 28 August 2019.

<sup>12</sup> UN General Assembly, *Moratorium on the use of the death penalty - Report of the Secretary General*, [A/75/309](#), 13 August 2020, para. 66.

<p>≈ 22 years</p>	<p>does not believe that he was crucified and resurrected. In his response, Kenneth referenced the Bible, rejected Muhammad's prophethood and the Qur'an, and welcomed Zafar to convert to Christianity and accept Jesus. <b>The Additional Session Court in Lahore in July 2002 convicted Kenneth of "defaming the sacred name of The Holy Prophet" Muhammad and sentenced to death</b> and a fine of 500 thousand Pakistani Rupees, a sentence which was upheld by Lahore High Court in June 2014. Kenneth has remained on death row for more than 22 years and filed his final appeal.<sup>13</sup></p>
<p>December 2011 - November 2021</p> <p>≈ 10 years</p>	<p>In December 2011 Punjab authorities arrested Seventh-Day Adventist <i>Sajjad Masih Gill</i> after accusations arose that he had sent blasphemous text messages regarding the Prophet. Despite that police were unable to find evidence of any such messages on his phone, a court in Gojra convicted Gill and sentenced him to life imprisonment. Gill's appeal hearing was postponed multiple times for various reasons; <b>in March 2021, the court had accepted the prosecution's argument that the death penalty was the appropriate punishment.</b> In a fortunate turn of events, in November 2021 Gill was finally acquitted of all charges on the grounds of insufficient evidence after he had spent an entire decade in prison. Gill is currently in hiding and is fearful that he may be killed by radical Muslims angry over his exoneration.<sup>14</sup></p>
<p>July 2012 - present</p> <p>≈ 11 years</p>	<p>In July 2012 Rawalpindi authorities arrested Christian man <i>Zafar Bhatti</i> in connection to a report of blasphemous text messages, despite that Bhatti was not named in the complaint. After Bhatti spent five years in pre-trial detention, in 2017 Judge Mohammad Yar charged him with blasphemy and sentenced him to life imprisonment. Another four years later in October 2021, <b>Justice Raja Shahid Mahmood Abbasi of the Lahore High Court Rawalpindi bench remanded Bhatti's case to the Rawalpindi District Court whose Judge Sahibzada Naqeeb Shehzad maintained Bhatti's charges and sentenced him to death in January 2022.</b><sup>15</sup></p>
<p>March 2013 - present</p> <p>≈ 10 years</p>	<p>In March 2013 university lecturer <i>Junaid Hafiz</i> was arrested and charged with blasphemy after a group of his students alleged that he had posted "derogatory comments" about the Prophet on social media. For five years, Hafiz was kept in solitary confinement until his trial <b>in December 2019, where the court convicted Hafiz and sentenced him to death.</b><sup>16</sup></p>
<p>June 2013 - June 2021</p> <p>8 years</p>	<p>In June 2013, a Muslim leader in Gojra, Muhammad Hussain, accused Christian couple <i>Shafqat Emmanuel</i> (husband) and <i>Shagufta Kausar</i> (wife) of sending him blasphemous text messages written in English. Despite numerous questionable details regarding the allegations, police charged the couple with blasphemy. <b>In 2014, a court in Toba Tek Singh convicted the couple and sentenced them to death.</b> Finally in June 2021, Lahore High Court Justices Syed Shehbaz Rizvi and Anwar-ul-Haq rescinded the death penalty, acquitted the couple, and ordered their release from prison. As of August 2021, the couple and their children have fled Pakistan to a safe European country.<sup>17</sup></p>
<p>September 2013 - present</p> <p>≈ 10 years</p>	<p>In September 2013, authorities in Lahore registered a case against private school principal <i>Salma Tanveer</i> following a tipoff from a local Muslim cleric that Tanveer had expressed a belief that Muhammad was not the final prophet of Islam.<sup>18</sup> For eight years, Tanveer's case remained relatively idle until <b>September 2021 when Judge Qureshi convicted Tanveer and sentenced her to death by hanging</b> in addition to a fine of 50,000 Pakistani Rupees.<sup>19</sup></p>

<sup>13</sup> Jubilee Campaign, "[Anwar Kenneth, a Christian Man on Death Row on Blasphemy Charges, Files Final Appeal Against the Death Sentence in Supreme Court of Pakistan](#)".

<sup>14</sup> Jubilee Campaign, "[Sajjad Masih Gill](#)".

<sup>15</sup> Church in Chains, "[Zafar Bhatti](#)", 11 March 2022. ; Release International, "[Prisoner Profile: Zafar Bhatti – Pakistan](#)". ; Voice of the Martyrs, "[PAKISTAN: Zafar Bhatti Recovers from Heart Attack in Prison](#)", 24 September 2020. ; British Asian Christian Association, "[Pakistan's longest serving blasphemy convict has been given death sentence](#)", 4 January 2022.

<sup>16</sup> BBC News, "[Junaid Hafeez: Academic sentenced to death for blasphemy in Pakistan](#)", 21 December 2019.

<sup>17</sup> Jubilee Campaign, "[Shagufta and Shafqat](#)"; Church in Chains, "[Shagufta & Shafqat](#)".

<sup>18</sup> Agenzia Fides, "[ASIA/PAKISTAN – Muslim woman sentenced to death for blasphemy](#)", 29 September 2021.

<sup>19</sup> Ross Ibbetson, "[School principal is sentenced to death for blasphemy in Pakistan after she was accused of distributing material deemed insulting to Prophet Muhammad](#)", *Daily Mail*, 28 September 2021.

<p>October 2013 - September 2020</p> <p>7 years</p>	<p>In October 2013, 37-year-old Christian man <i>Asif Pervaiz</i> was detained after his former work supervisor filed a complaint against Pervaiz for allegedly sending him blasphemous text messages; Pervaiz repeatedly denied the charges against him, stating that he believes the charges were filed against him as an act of revenge for refusing his supervisor's demands to convert to Islam. In September 2020, Judge Qureshi of the <b>Lahore Additional Sessions Court convicted Pervaiz of blasphemy and sentenced him to three years' imprisonment for "phone misuse", followed by execution by hanging for blasphemy.</b><sup>20</sup></p>
<p>November 2014 - present</p> <p>≈ 9 years</p>	<p>In November 2014, police arrested Christian brothers <i>Qaiser Ayub</i> and <i>Amoon Ayub</i> following an accusation by Muhammad Saeed that they had posted blasphemous remarks on social media. <b>A sessions court formally sentenced the two defendants to death in 2018</b> and, regrettably, <b>in June 2022, Lahore High Court Rawalpindi justices Raja Shahid Mehmood Abbasi and Chaudhry Abdul Aziz rejected the appeals and upheld the original sentences.</b><sup>21</sup></p>
<p>March 2017 - present</p> <p>≈ 6 years</p>	<p>In March 2017, Pakistani authorities arrested three men - <i>Rana Nouman Razaqat</i>, <i>Abdul Waheed</i>, and <i>Nasir Ahmad</i> - for allegedly posting blasphemous content on YouTube. All three men were formally indicted in September 2017 for "intending to outrage religious feelings" and "insulting the Prophet Muhammad", in addition to one crime listed in the 1997 Anti-Terrorism Act: "incit[ing] hatred and contempt on religious, sectarian or ethnic basis to stir up violence or cause internal disturbance".<sup>22</sup> <b>In early January 2021, Judge Raja Jawad Abbas of an anti-terrorism court in Islamabad sentenced all three men to death for blasphemy.</b><sup>23</sup></p>
<p>June 2017 - present</p> <p>≈ 6 years</p>	<p>In June 2017, Christian motorcycle mechanic <i>Ashfaq Masih</i> was charged with committing blasphemy after he had allegedly made blasphemous and derogatory remarks about the Prophet. A Muslim customer had demanded that the cost of his motorcycle repair be waived on the grounds that he (the customer) was Muslim, but Masih responded that he was a Christian and would require payment for his services. <b>In July 2022, the Lahore High Court convicted Masih and sentenced him to death.</b><sup>24</sup></p>
<p>July 2019 - present</p> <p>≈ 4 years</p>	<p>In June 2023, <b>22-year-old Christian man Noman Masih was convicted of blasphemy and sentenced to death by a court in Bahawalpur</b> for allegedly storing blasphemous images of the Prophet on his cell phone which he shared to other WhatsApp users. Authorities had initially detained Masih in July 2019 when his cousin Sunny Waqas - who had been detained for having physically printed the blasphemous caricatures - identified Masih as being the one who distributed the images virtually. Prosecutors could not find a witness to testify against Masih but forensic experts determined that the blasphemous images were stored on and disseminated from Masih's phone. Masih's defense attorneys have noted, however, that his phone could have been tampered with to fabricate incriminating evidence, as it had been in possession of the police for nearly three years.<sup>25</sup></p>
<p>May 2020 - present</p> <p>≈ 3 years</p>	<p>In May 2020, authorities arrested and charged 26-year-old Muslim woman <i>Aneeqa Ateeq</i> with posting "blasphemous material" as her WhatsApp status. Ateeq explained that she believed the complainant Hasnat Farooq had intentionally provoked her to engage in a religious debate after she had refused to "be friendly" with him. <b>In late January 2022, a Rawalpindi court convicted Ateeq of blasphemy and sentenced her to death by hanging.</b><sup>26</sup></p>
<p>June 2020 -</p>	<p>In June 2020, Faisalabad authorities arrested <i>Wasim Abbas</i> after an unnamed individual filed a complaint alleging that he had made derogatory and insulting comments about the</p>

<sup>20</sup> Asad Hashim, "[Pakistani Christian sentenced to death for 'blasphemous texts'](#)", *Al Jazeera*, 8 September 2020. ; Church in Chains, [Asif Pervaiz](#), 10 February 2022.

<sup>21</sup> The Hindu, "[Pakistan court upholds death sentence of Christian brothers in blasphemy case](#)", 10 June 2022.

<sup>22</sup> [Pakistan] [Anti-Terrorism Act, 1997](#).

<sup>23</sup> The Tribune, "[3 men sentenced to death for blasphemy in Pakistan](#)", 8 January 2021. ; USCIRF FoRB Victims Database, [Rana Nouman Razaqat, Abdul Waheed, Nasir Ahmad](#).

<sup>24</sup> Shafique Khokhar, "[Lahore court sentences Christian man to death over false blasphemy charges](#)", *Asia News*, 7 November 2022.

<sup>25</sup> Massimo Introvigne, "[Pakistan, Young Christian Sentenced to Death for Blasphemy](#)", *Bitter Winter*, 7 June 2023.

<sup>26</sup> Haroon Janjua, "[Pakistan: 'WhatsApp blasphemy' death sentence reinforces dangerous trend](#)", *DW*, 21 January 2022. ; Shah Meer Baloch & Hannah Ellis-Petersen, "[Woman sentenced to death in Pakistan over 'blasphemous' WhatsApp activity](#)", *The Guardian*, 19 January 2022.

present ≈ 3 years	prophet. <b>In February 2022, Additional Sessions Judge Rana Sohail Tariq convicted Abbas of blasphemy and sentenced him to death.</b> <sup>27</sup>
----------------------	--

There are many additional cases in which individuals are convicted of blasphemy and, while not sentenced to death, are issued various terms of imprisonment, as well as individuals who are currently detained or on bail awaiting formal charges or acquittal thereof. Many face the high likelihood of being sentenced to death as prescribed by the Penal Code, unless there is insufficient evidence or if the defendants are minors:

2009 - December 2021  ≈ 12 years	In 2013, authorities convicted <i>Liaquat Ali</i> of blasphemy and sentenced him to life imprisonment after he was arrested on accusations by three men of burning a Quran on a stove four years prior. Ali explained to the police that he believed the three complainants had conspired to frame him for committing blasphemy because he had previously physically assaulted Ghani (the complainant) after witnessing him “in a compromising state with his [Ali’s] mother in their house”. After serving eleven years of his life imprisonment, he was acquitted in December 2021 by the Lahore High Court due to insufficient evidence and violations of Ali’s due process. <sup>28</sup>
November 2017 - present  ≈ 6 years	In November 2017, Pakistani authorities arrested Christian man <i>Nadeem Samson</i> after two men, Abdul Huq and Sakhawat Dogar, accused him of posting blasphemous statements on his Facebook account. Samson has repeatedly asserted his innocence and explained that he believes Huq and Dogar had conspired to set up a fake Facebook account in Samson’s name using his public phone number, and post blasphemous remarks in order to frame him for a crime as an act of revenge for a prior property dispute. Since his arrest and subsequent charges for blasphemy, Samson has been detained in a Lahore jail where he has reportedly been denied treatment for his kidney stones and deteriorating vision. In January 2022, Samson’s lawyer Saiful Malook reported that Samson had been granted bail after four years in prison; however, his case is still pending in the District Lahore Court. <sup>29</sup>
2018 - present  ≈ 5 years	In August 2022, Supreme Court Justices Ijaz Ul Ahsan and Mazahar Ali Naqvi granted bail to Christian men <i>Patras Masih</i> and <i>Raja Waris</i> , both of whom had been charged with blasphemy, though in separate cases. Patras Masih was originally arrested in 2018 at the age of 18 years on accusations that he had shared an insulting image of the Prophet’s grave on social media; the judges had cited “peculiar aspects and facts of the case” and concluded that “keeping the petitioner [Masih] behind the bars for an indefinite period would not be in the interest of justice since he has already spent four years in prison”. In a separate incident, Raja Waris was arrested in early 2021 and charged with blasphemy for a post he made on social media which allegedly disparaged a “holy personage”. Justices Uli Ahsan and Ali Naqvi determined that the court had not acquired written permission to try the case from the Central Government or Provincial Government, as is required in Chapters VI and IXA of the Penal Code. <sup>30</sup>
March 2019 - present  ≈ 4 years	In March 2019, Pakistani Christian <i>Stephen Masih</i> who suffers from bipolar disorder was accused of verbally offending his Muslim woman neighbor during an argument. The following day, the woman’s husband, Muslim cleric Hafiz Muhammad Mudassar, came to Masih’s home with a mob of angry Muslims who then physically assaulted Masih and accused him of making blasphemous remarks. Rather than arresting the assailants, authorities upon arrival detained Masih, after which he was charged with blasphemy in June 2019. <sup>31</sup> In March 2020 a medical board was convened to review Stephen Masih’s mental health four months after the initial application request was sent in, and in July 2021, the medical board finally released its health report to the court after leaving it pending for a

<sup>27</sup> The Hindu, “[Pakistani man sentenced to death in blasphemy case](#)”, 24 February 2022.

<sup>28</sup> Rehan Piracha, “[Man Acquitted Of Blasphemy After 11 Years In Jail](#)”, *Voice PK*, 9 December 2021.

<sup>29</sup> Jubilee Campaign, “[Nadeem Samson](#)”.

<sup>30</sup> Morning Star News, “[Two More Christians Accused of Blasphemy Receive Bail](#)”, 30 August 2022.

<sup>31</sup> Jubilee Campaign, “[Stephen Masih](#)”.

	year. Masih was eventually granted bail in June 2022, however his charges have not been dropped. <sup>32</sup>
2019 - present ≈ 4 years	In January 2023, the Bahawalpur bench of Lahore High Court imposed a bail to the amount of 4 million Pakistani Rupees upon a poor 23-year-old Catholic man <i>Sunny Waqas</i> who was arrested in 2019 and charged with blasphemy for carrying printed photos of the Prophet in his book bag. The unjustly exorbitant bail amount far exceeds the maximum amount - 500,000 Pakistani Rupees - as is stipulated for the 'crime' of blasphemy. Additionally, at the time of his arrest in 2019, Waqas had identified his cousin Noman Masih as the distributor of the images, and Masih has since been convicted of blasphemy and sentenced to death. <sup>33</sup>
April 2020 - present ≈ 3 years	In April 2020, Ahmadi Muslim woman <i>Ramzan Bibi</i> attempted to make a charitable donation for a local mosque celebration but was confused when her money was returned to her without explanation. When Bibi asked a non-Ahmadi relative the reasoning behind her donation rejection, there allegedly ensued a verbal argument, after which local non-Ahmadi residents accused Bibi of insulting the Prophet. Bibi was charged with blasphemy and is currently detained in Central Jail Lahore. Bibi's bail application was rejected in November 2020 by Judge Tariq Saleem. <sup>34</sup>
September 2020 - present ≈ 3 years	In September 2020, Pakistani authorities in Peshawar digitally tracked down the location of and arrested 42-year-old <i>Bashir Mastan</i> after he had posted a video on the internet in which he claimed to be a prophet. Just over a year later in December 2021, additional district and sessions judge Mohammad Tahir Aurangzeb charged Mastan with blasphemy and sentenced him to two years' "rigorous imprisonment". <sup>35</sup>
April 2021 - November 2021 ≈ 7 months	In April 2021, two Roman Catholic nurses employed at Civil Hospital in Faisalabad, <i>Mariyum Lal</i> and <i>Newsh Arooj</i> , were instructed by a senior nurse by the name of Rukhsana to remove some old hospital wall decorations. Meanwhile, Rukhsana provoked her Muslim colleagues by claiming that Lal and Arooj were removing signage with Quranic verses. Immediately, a mob of Muslim hospital employees gathered to demand Lal's and Arooj's deaths, and one employee named Waqas attacked Lal with a knife. Instead of arresting the assailant or the inciting mob, Pakistani authorities detained Lal and Arooj. Fortunately, in November 2021 it was reported that Lal and Arooj had been acquitted of their charges by Faisalabad Additional Sessions Court Judge Shahzad Ahmad on lack of evidence but that the decision was not publicly reported for fear of backlash from radical Muslims. <sup>36</sup>
July 2021 - present ≈ 2 years	In July 2021, Pakistani Christian woman <i>Shagufta Kiran</i> was arrested without warrant by officers from Pakistan's Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) while she was inside her home; throughout the incident, the authorities had allegedly pushed Kiran, slapped her daughter, and threatened to shoot them. Kiran's husband Rafique Masih explained that his wife was arrested after she inadvertently forwarded a blasphemous message in a WhatsApp group of which she was a member in September 2020. <sup>37</sup> Shiraz Ahmed Farooqi, the admin of the WhatsApp group "Pure Discussion" and a member of "Islamist group Tehreek Tahaffuz-i-Namoos-Risalat (TTNR, Movement for Protection of Finality of Prophethood)", was the individual who filed the case against Kiran. Kiran remains in pre-trial detention at Adiala Central Jail in Rawalpindi where she is kept in solitary confinement and spends her days reading her Bible and praying. The Islamabad High Court rejected Kiran's petition for bail in April 2023, and her case hearings are frequently adjourned and postponed. <sup>38</sup>
January 2022 -	In January 2022, Lahore High Court rejected the bail applications of three Ahmadiyya Muslims - <i>Mahmood Iqbal Hashimi</i> , <i>Shiraz Ahmad</i> , and <i>Zaheer Ahmad</i> - who had been

<sup>32</sup> Agenzia Fides, "[ASIA/PAKISTAN - Mentally disabled Christian accused of blasphemy released on bail](#)", 6 June 2022. ; Alliance Defending Freedom International, "[BAIL FOR 'BLASPHEMY': Man granted bail after 3 years in prison for 'blaspheming' during neighborhood pigeon argument](#)", 6 June 2022.

<sup>33</sup> Morning Star News, "[Excessive Bail Bond Required of Christian in Pakistan](#)", 20 February 2023.

<sup>34</sup> Jubilee Campaign, "[Ramzan Bibi](#)".

<sup>35</sup> Dawn, "[Man gets death sentence for blasphemy](#)", 24 December 2021.

<sup>36</sup> Jubilee Campaign, "[Mariyum and Newsh](#)".

<sup>37</sup> Voice of the Persecuted, "[Pakistan: Another Christian woman accused of blasphemy for forwarding a text](#)". ; Shafique Khokhar, "[Christian woman still jailed in Islamabad on blasphemy charges after more than nine months](#)", *Asia News*, 19 May 2022.

<sup>38</sup> Church in Chains, "[Shagufta Kiran](#)".



present ≈ 2 years	arrested earlier on blasphemy charges for their involvement in the management of a WhatsApp group called “Sindh Salamati”. The defendants circulated news and literature regarding the Ahmadiyya faith and community which the complainant, Mohammad Irfan, claimed was an act of blasphemy, illegal proselytism, and “sharing a distorted version of the Holy Quran”. <sup>39</sup>
March 2022 - present ≈ 1 year	In March 2022, a group of twelve Pakistani authorities of the Federal Investigation Agency Gujranwala Circle arrested 54-year-old Christian man <i>Fansan Shahid</i> and physically assaulted him in front of his wife and two adult children. A local Islamic cleric had filed a complaint against Shahid for allegedly sending blasphemous text messages, although Shahid’s wife explained that he had lost his phone in 2019 and that his Facebook account could have been accessed by whomever acquired the device. <sup>40</sup>
September 2022 - present ≈ 1 year	In July 2023, Catholic man <i>Imran Rehman</i> was formally charged pursuant to the nation’s new anti-terrorism legislation after he had been arrested in September 2022 on allegations that he shared blasphemous messages in a WhatsApp group. Rehman’s lawyer Rana Abdul Hameed asserts that the defendant did not commit blasphemy and that his charges are “illogical and illegal” as “there’s no legal provision yet for trying blasphemy accused under anti-terror laws”. <sup>41</sup>
November 2022 - present < 1 year	In November 2022, authorities in Islamabad charged Christian father and sanitary worker <i>Ishtiaq Saleem</i> for blasphemy after he had been accused of “creating visual content depicting the name of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) written on private parts of a naked body” and circulating them on WhatsApp. Upon his arrest, Saleem was physically and verbally assaulted by authorities who additionally confiscated his phone and coerced him to make a false confession. Saleem’s father reported that Ishtiaq has asserted that the sacrilegious images were inadvertently downloaded onto his phone. <sup>42</sup> It is worth noting that WhatsApp, by default and without input from users, automatically stores images sent in group chats onto the member users’ phones. <sup>43</sup>
April 2023 - present 4 months	In April 2023, police in Punjab arrived at the home of Muslim woman <i>Sana Ullah</i> and arrested her on blasphemy charges after she had been surrounded by an angry mob who was incensed that she had allegedly claimed to be a prophet. <sup>44</sup>
May 2023 - present 3 months	In May 2023, two Christian teenagers - <i>Simon Nadeem</i> , 14, and <i>Adil Baber</i> , 18 - were detained and sent to prison after they were accused by police constable Zahid Sohail of committing blasphemy. According to Sohail’s story, the two minors had allegedly been teasing each other and calling a puppy Muhammad Ali, which could perhaps be misconstrued as a derogatory reference to the Prophet. However, the defendants’ families have insisted that there was no puppy involved - neither owns a dog - and that the real situation was that the two boys were discussing the renowned brand name ‘Muhammad Ali’ smokeless tobacco dip that Baber uses. Sohail, who saw the interaction between the two teens, loudly accused them of committing blasphemy and gathered the attention of nearby individuals who formed a mob of onlookers. <sup>45</sup> The boys escaped physical assault but their parents later turned them into police, not as an act of punishment for their children but rather as a form of protective custody they could be provided in case of future reactionary violence against them. <sup>46</sup>
June 2023 - present	In June 2023, Punjab authorities charged Christian man <i>Haroon Shahzad</i> with blasphemy after he had infuriated local Muslim residents by posting on Facebook Bible verses

<sup>39</sup> Massimo Introvigne, “Pakistan: Three Arrested and Denied Bail for Creating an Ahmadi WhatsApp Group”, *Bitter Winter*, 18 January 2022.

<sup>40</sup> Morning Star News, “Christian in Pakistan Arrested, Tortured on Blasphemy Charges”, 21 March 2022.

<sup>41</sup> Morning Star News, “Christian Charged with Blasphemy under Pakistan’s Terrorism Law”, 24 July 2023.

<sup>42</sup> Morning Star News, “Christian Falsely Accused of Blasphemy, Father Says”, 17 January 2023.

<sup>43</sup> Mark O’Neill, “How to stop WhatsApp from saving photos and videos in your gallery”, *Android Authority*, 4 August 2023. ; Sean Keach, “I-SPY WhatsApp users warned to turn photo-download feature off immediately - or risk being hacked”, *The US Sun*, 29 September 2020.

<sup>44</sup> Associated Press, “Pakistan arrests woman for claiming to be Islam’s prophet”, 14 April 2023.

<sup>45</sup> Info Chrétienne, “Two Christian teenagers charged with blasphemy in Pakistan”, 23 May 2023. ; Pakistan Christian Post, “Two Christian teenagers charged with blasphemy and sentenced to jail”, 21 May 2023.

<sup>46</sup> *Supra note 9.*

2 months	regarding food sacrifices on the same day that Muslims initiated their Eid al-Adha festival in which an animal is slaughtered for consumption. After the incident, mosque loudspeakers summoned Muslims for a protest, but district police intervened before a mob could form. Authorities have attempted to locate Shahzad - who had withdrawn into hiding along with his wife and six children - to arrest him on blasphemy charges. <sup>47</sup>
July 2023 - present 1 month	In July 2023, authorities in Arifwala arrested five individuals on blasphemy charges for their affiliation with a WhatsApp group chat which allegedly shared “posts and messages that fanned religious hatred against a sect”. Two of the detained were admins of the group in question, and the remaining three were members. <sup>48</sup>
July 2023 - present 1 month	In July 2023, an unnamed retired Muslim teacher was arrested after he had reportedly made disrespectful and offensive comments about the Prophet on social media. The instructor asserts that he has not posted such material and that his account had been hacked by another online user. <sup>49</sup>
July 2023 - present 1 month	In July 2023, Sargodha authorities arrested 35-year-old Christian man <i>Zaki Masih</i> on blasphemy charges for allegedly insulting Islam on Facebook, despite that both Masih’s brother and the village’s imam have confirmed that the accusations are unfounded. The blasphemous post in question - which criticized individuals who “adulterated basic food items such as milk” - was actually attributed to another unrelated individual. Additionally, the accuser in this case is friends with a Muslim individual with whom Masih previously had a property dispute. <sup>50</sup>

In its December 2022 State party report to the Human Rights Committee<sup>51</sup>, Pakistan makes numerous claims that the rights of defendants are upheld throughout trial proceedings; however, these assertions are disproved upon further delineation of the above mentioned cases.

*Concerns Regarding Lack of Fair Trial in Cases Regarding Alleged Blasphemy and Authorities’ Discrimination against Religious Minorities*

Numerous cases of individuals accused of blasphemy contradict Pakistan’s claims that “pre-trial detention in Pakistan is used solely as an exceptional measure, mostly in terrorism cases”. Pakistani authorities arrested Seventh-Day Adventist *Sajjad Masih Gill* on charges of blasphemy and only acquitted him in November 2021, on the grounds of insufficient evidence, after detaining him for an entire decade.<sup>52</sup> Authorities kept Christian man *Zafar Bhatti* in pretrial detention for five years without any formal charges until a court sentenced him to life imprisonment for alleged blasphemy in 2017. Bhatti’s appeal hearing was adjourned no fewer than 25 times before taking place in 2022 during which authorities extended his sentence to the death penalty.<sup>53</sup> Authorities kept Christian father *Asif Pervaiz* languishing in Lahore District Jail for seven years between the accusation of sending blasphemous messages was raised against him in 2013 and his trial which took place in 2020.<sup>54</sup> Authorities also detained Professor *Junaid Hafiz* for five years in pre-trial solitary confinement until the court issued a death sentence in 2019 for allegedly posting blasphemous content on social media.<sup>55</sup> Authorities imprisoned Christian brothers *Qaiser* and *Amoon Ayub* for four years, separating the brothers from their wives and children.<sup>56</sup>

Contrary to Pakistan’s insistence that “the death penalty is awarded by courts after following due process of law”, numerous individuals have been arraigned, forced to attend swift trials, and sentenced to death without meeting the burden of proof. In 2014, a Toba Tek Singh court convicted Christian couple *Shafqat*

<sup>47</sup> Morning Star News, “[Christian in Pakistan Charged with Blasphemy for Bible Post](#)”, 4 July 2023.

<sup>48</sup> Asian News International, “[Pak: Blasphemy case registered against five members of WhatsApp group](#)”, 25 July 2023.

<sup>49</sup> Asian News International, “[Pakistan: Teacher arrested over disrespectful social media posts on Islam](#)”, 11 July 2023.

<sup>50</sup> Morning Star News, “[Arrested Christian in Pakistan Denies Sharing Facebook Post](#)”, 12 July 2023.

<sup>51</sup> *Supra* note 9.

<sup>52</sup> *Supra* note 14.

<sup>53</sup> *Supra* note 15.

<sup>54</sup> Church in Chains, [Asif Pervaiz](#).

<sup>55</sup> *Supra* note 16.

<sup>56</sup> Ex-Muslims of North America, “[Qaisar and Amoon Ayub Sentenced to Death after Exile and Imprisonment for Online Blasphemy](#)”.

*Emmanuel* and *Shagufta Kausar* of blasphemy and sentenced the two to death despite numerous discrepancies and miscarriages of justice throughout their case, including: failure to recover the phone from which the couple allegedly sent blasphemous text messages, disregard that the couple was illiterate in English and therefore be unable to send such correspondence, and refusal to consider the prior aversive relationship between the accuser and the defendants which could provide a motive for false allegations.<sup>57</sup> In January 2022 after a trial in which she was denied legal counsel and forced to defend herself, Muslim woman *Aneeqa Ateeq* was sentenced to death for allegedly posting blasphemous remarks as her WhatsApp status.<sup>58</sup>

Pakistan makes numerous assertions that false accusations of blasphemy are treated with utmost solemnity with regards to punishing accusers that spread such misinformation. In 2015 Judge Malik Mohammad Mumtaz Qadri reiterated that “the State is to ensure that innocent persons are not tried on false blasphemy charges”. Notwithstanding international consensus that blasphemous conduct in itself is neither egregious and violent nor deserving of capital punishment, Pakistan has reneged on its guarantee to protect people of faith from being baselessly accused of blasphemy. In multiple cases, the court declines to investigate signs of inconsistency, conspiracy, and conflicts of interest in legal cases, which would call into question the validity of the allegations of blasphemy. *Shagufta Kausar* and *Shafqat Emmanuel* were convicted and sentenced to death despite raising concerns that their accuser - with whom they had previously had a dispute - might have motives to frame the couple for blasphemy.<sup>59</sup> In 2023, authorities formally charged Christian man *Zaki Masih* with blasphemy without consideration that the complainant was a friend of a Muslim individual with whom Masih was not on cordial terms with; additionally, the defendant’s brother and a local imam asserted that no such blasphemous activity had occurred.<sup>60</sup> Christian man *Nadeem Samson* was granted bail in 2022 after four years in detention on blasphemy charges after he was accused for posting sacrilegious content; Samson himself noted that the two complainants were individuals with whom he had previously had a property dispute and who could have conspired to frame him.<sup>61</sup> Mentally ill Christian man *Stephen Masih* was charged with blasphemy - and later granted bail - based on groundless allegations made by his neighbor; the complainant had been angry after Masih had argued with his [the complainant’s] wife about a pigeon and could have fabricated an accusation of blasphemy with which he could exact revenge upon Masih.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, even when accused individuals charged with blasphemy are acquitted much later due to lack of evidence or “peculiar aspects and facts of the case”<sup>63</sup>, there is no follow-up news regarding what punitive action - if any - has been sanctioned for those who make unfounded accusations without evidence and with ulterior motives.

Pakistan noted that in February 2021, the Supreme Court made a remarkable positive step by “barring the use of the death penalty for inmates with serious mental conditions who ‘are unable to comprehend the rationale behind their execution’”. The same judgment noted that for such exemption to apply, a medical board must evaluate and determine infirm status. In March 2019, Punjab authorities arrested Christian man *Stephen Masih* after he had allegedly committed blasphemy while arguing with a neighbor about a pigeon. Masih spent three months in detention before being formally charged with blasphemy despite his family’s repeated assertions that he suffered a mental condition that impeded upon normal thought processes. In July 2021 a medical board comprising experts from the Punjab Institute of Mental Health provided to the court its examination of Masih’s mental condition in which he was diagnosed with Bipolar Affective Disorder and declared “unfit to stand trial at the moment” due to impaired “judgment, behaviour and the ability to think clearly”. It was later revealed that while Masih had been misdiagnosed, he did have some apparent mental disorder or ailment. Masih was eventually released from prison in June 2022<sup>64</sup>; however, it should be noted that he was granted clemency only due to outward pressure on the courts from the international human rights activists and that other cases indicate that the death penalty has been handed to mentally unfit individuals. In September 2021, a judge convicted private

---

<sup>57</sup> Church in Chains, *Shagufta & Shafqat*, 2 September 2021.

<sup>58</sup> Haroon Janjua, “Pakistan: ‘WhatsApp blasphemy’ death sentence reinforces dangerous trend”, *DW*, 21 January 2022. ; Shah Meer Baloch & Hannah Ellis Petersen, “Woman sentenced to death in Pakistan over ‘blasphemous’ WhatsApp activity”, *The Guardian*, 19 January 2022.

<sup>59</sup> *Supra* note 17.

<sup>60</sup> *Supra* note 50.

<sup>61</sup> *Supra* note 29.

<sup>62</sup> *Supra* notes 31; 32.

<sup>63</sup> *Supra* note 30.

<sup>64</sup> Jubilee Campaign, [Letter to UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: Justice for Stephen Masih](#), 13 September 2021.

school principal *Salma Tanveer* of blasphemy and sentenced her to death by hanging after she had expressed her belief that Muhammad was not the final Prophet eight years earlier. This unjust penalty was decided despite the submission of medical records upon her original date of detention in 2013 which concluded that Tanveer was “suffering from Schizoaffective Disorder” which rendered her unsuitable to stand trial.<sup>65</sup>

### Violations of the Convention Against Torture and Neglect of the Medical Needs of Anti-Blasphemy Law Victims

Despite Pakistan’s “zero tolerance policy against torture” and commitment to “significantly reducing incidents of torture against persons in police custody”, numerous cases indicate failure and/or unwillingness to follow through with these promises. *Zafar Bhatti* had reported being physically assaulted by prison officials in order to extract confessions, a tactic which was also employed against *Shafqat Emmanuel*. *Asia Bibi*, who wrote a memoir detailing her time on death row between her sentencing in 2010 to her acquittal in 2021, recalled the following torturous conditions and violence to which she was subjected in custody: “my neck is compressed by a neck brace and the guard can tighten as much as he wants with a big key. A long chain drags on the dirty floor; it links my throat to the guard’s handcuffs that drag me like a dog”.<sup>66</sup> The above cases exhibit Pakistan’s non-adherence not only to its own principles but also the Committee’s recommendations that “26. The State party should: (c) ensure that confessions obtained by coercion are never admissible in legal proceedings”; and “(d) take all measures necessary to prevent torture, including by strengthening the training of judges, prosecutors, the police and military and security forces”.<sup>67</sup>

Pakistan alleges that “any public servant involved in torture would face up to 10 years imprisonment and a fine of up to PKR 2 million. If a public servant, whose duty it is to prevent torture, either intentionally or negligently fails to prevent it, he/she will face up to five years imprisonment and a fine of up to PKR 1 million”. However, *Asia Bibi*’s testimony of having been subjected to torture by state actors was dismissed by Pakistani authorities on the grounds that they were “not plausible”.<sup>68</sup>

Pakistan claims that “all prisoners especially those on death row are provided proper negative medical treatment”. *Shafqat Emmanuel* was denied medical care for his pre-existing paralysis while in detention.<sup>69</sup> *Zafar Bhatti*, during his five years of pretrial detention, had developed diabetes and had suffered three heart attacks.<sup>70</sup> *Nadeem Samson* has never been provided care for his deteriorating mental health and his kidney stones.<sup>71</sup>

### Reports of Extrajudicial executions and unlawful killings

Pakistan asserts that it “ensures security measures to judges hearing and deciding cases in respect of [] blasphemy” so they may be “without fear of any untoward consequences, hence, enabling them to decide matters fairly as per law”. Such alleged protection, however, does not appear to extend to other actors engaged in blasphemy cases. In 2014, a group of gunmen shot and killed *Rashid Rehman*, the attorney representing university lecturer *Junaid Hafiz* who had reportedly posted blasphemous comments on social media. Two of Rehman’s colleagues who were present with him at their law office during the attack survived with injuries.<sup>72</sup> It is also worth noting that Pakistan’s claims of providing security to judges overseeing blasphemy cases, lose credibility as historic precedent highlights the tremendous pressure judges face in controversial faith-based legal cases and indicates that judicial state actors are not immune to external threats and coercion. Individuals who question the status quo and challenge Islamic classical

<sup>65</sup> Agenzia Fides, [“ASIA/PAKISTAN – Muslim woman sentenced to death for blasphemy”](#), 29 September 2021. ; Ross Ibbetson, [“School principal is sentenced to death for blasphemy in Pakistan after she was accused of distributing material deemed insulting to Prophet Muhammad”](#), *Daily Mail*, 28 September 2021. ; Wajih Ahmad Sheikh, [“Woman gets death fine for blasphemy in Lahore”](#), *Dawn*, 28 September 2021.

<sup>66</sup> BBC News, [“Asia Bibi: I always believed I would be freed”](#), 28 February 2020. ; BBC, [“Asia Bibi: Pakistani Christian woman breaks silence in new book”](#), 30 January 2020.

<sup>67</sup> *Supra note 10*.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>69</sup> *Supra note 17*.

<sup>70</sup> *Supra note 15*.

<sup>71</sup> *Supra note 29*.

<sup>72</sup> BBC News, [“Junaid Hafiz: Academic sentenced to death for blasphemy in Pakistan”](#), 21 December 2019.

understanding risk their status and position in society and even have to fear for their own lives. In the case of Christian woman *Asia Bibi* - who was sentenced to death in 2010 for defending her faith after two coworkers reprimanded her for drinking water out of the same cup as Muslims - Supreme Court judges overseeing her appeal in September 2018 were threatened by Muslim extremists with a “horrible end” if they overturned Bibi’s conviction. The 2018 acquittal of Bibi spotlighted a “hard-line and violent protest movement known as ‘Labaik’” which actively intimidates judges and court officials to issue the harshest of penalties - capital punishment - to individuals accused of blasphemy notwithstanding any details which potentially undermine the credibility of such cases.<sup>73</sup>

In its December 2022 State party report to the Human Rights Committee<sup>74</sup>, Pakistan notes that there “is no justification for a civilian - or any individual not in the position of authority - to decide to take the law into his/her own hands and punish or kill [an] alleged offender”. Indeed, there is a horrific pattern in which individuals accused of blasphemy are physically assaulted and/or lynched by other civilians - either before they are even able to have their case heard in court and any ‘evidence’ is presented, or following their case being dismissed due to insufficient evidence:

July 2020	In July 2020, while Ahmadi Muslim man and Pakistani-American citizen <i>Tahir Ahmad Naseem</i> was on trial in Peshawar for blasphemy, a teenage boy who had eluded security shot Naseem six times, killing him. Although the perpetrator was charged with murder, the Pakistani radical Muslim community has praised him and deemed him a ‘holy warrior’. Naseem’s daughter believes that her father was “lured into a trap by extremists who befriended him on Facebook” and “challenged him to a religious debate” in which he made allegedly blasphemous remarks. <sup>75</sup>
March 2021	In March 2021, Shia Muslim religious scholar <i>Taqi Shah</i> was attending a local festival in Basti Murad, Jhang District, Punjab with his friend Hasnain Shah, when an unidentified assailant attacked and killed Taqi Shah with an ax. The attacker informed authorities that he had murdered Shah because Shah had previously been charged with blasphemy in 2019 and had, more recently, allegedly committed blasphemy in an argument during a volleyball game. <sup>76</sup>
July 2021	In July 2021, a 21-year-old rookie Pakistani police constable “hacked to death” civilian man <i>Muhammad Waqas</i> in the district of Sadiqabad. Previously, Waqas was charged with blasphemy in 2016 for sharing allegedly blasphemous content on social media, though he was eventually acquitted by the Lahore High Court on appeal. Waqas spent some years in hiding after his release from prison and had returned to his home community only weeks prior to his murder. When questioned, the perpetrator explained that he killed Waqas because “he committed blasphemy”. <sup>77</sup>
December 2021	In December 2021, a large mob of Muslim extremists in Sialkot physically attacked, killed, and then set fire to the deceased body of Sri Lankan national and general manager of Rajoco Industries, <i>Priyantha Diyawadana</i> , after rumors had spread that he had removed from the factory walls a poster with Qur’anic text on it. <sup>78</sup> By April 2022, an antiterrorism court in Pakistan sentenced six perpetrators to death, nine to life imprisonment, one to five years’ imprisonment, and 72 to two years’ imprisonment <sup>79</sup>
February 2022	In February 2022, a mosque custodian in Khanewal District, Punjab Province told local residents that he had witnessed mentally unstable 41-year-old <i>Mushtaq Ahmed</i> desecrating and burning a copy of the Qur’an while inside the house of worship. The following day, authorities briefly detained Ahmed under the accusations before a mob of some 300 angry

<sup>73</sup> International Crisis Group, [A New Era of Sectarian Violence in Pakistan](#), 5 September 2022.

<sup>74</sup> *Supra* note 9.

<sup>75</sup> Emma Graham-Harrison, [“He was such a kind soul”: daughter’s fight for US man killed at Pakistan blasphemy trial](#), *The Guardian*, 30 August 2020. ; Umar Farooq & Jibrin Ahmad, [“Holy warrior” selfies: Pakistan teen feted for killing U.S. blasphemy suspect](#), *Reuters*, 9 August 2020.

<sup>76</sup> Imran Gabol, [“Man axed to death over blasphemy allegations in Punjab’s Jhang”](#), *Dawn*, 26 March 2021.

<sup>77</sup> David Averre, [“Man cleared of committing blasphemy in Pakistan is hacked to death ‘by policeman who refused to believe he was innocent’”](#), *Daily Mail*, 3 July 2021.

<sup>78</sup> Imran Sadiq, [“Sialkot lynching: New footage shows a colleague trying to save Sri Lankan man; police arrest scores”](#), *Dawn*, 4 December 2021. ; Shah Meer Baloch & Hannah Ellis-Petersen, [“Man tortured and killed in Pakistan over ‘blasphemy’”](#), *The Guardian*, 31 December 2021.

<sup>79</sup> Mubasher Bukhari & Asif Shahzad, [“Lynching of Sri Lankan manager by Pakistani mob was anti-Islam, court says”](#), *Reuters*, 19 April 2022.

	Muslims abducted him, physically attacked him with bricks and iron rods, and subsequently lynched him on a nearby tree. <sup>80</sup>
March 2022	In March 2022, 21-year-old Pakistani woman <i>Safoora Bibi</i> who taught at Jamia Islamia Falahul Binaat, a theological seminary in Dera Ismail Khan, was killed by a female colleague and two female students; the two students were nieces of the adult perpetrator, Umra Aman. One of the killers, a 13-year-old schoolgirl, claimed that she had had a dream in which Prophet Muhammad came to her, informed her that Bibi had committed blasphemy, and ordered her to kill her teacher. <sup>81</sup>
August 2022	In August 2022, sanitary worker <i>Ashok Kumar</i> barely escaped a mob lynching after a Muslim shopkeeper filed a false report against him for allegedly desecrating the Qur'an. Videos circulated on social media showing an angry mob scaling the side of a building trying to exact revenge. In another video, Pakistani authorities can be seen dispersing the group, albeit violently. <sup>82</sup>
February 2023	In February 2023, <i>Muhammad Waris</i> was abducted from police custody by a mob and dragged into the street and subsequently beaten to death; his attackers were angry that he had allegedly "desecrated pages of the Qur'an" by pasting images of himself, his wife, and a knife onto pages of the holy book. A video of the lynching circulated on social media depicting the mob - which amassed hundreds of participants - additionally stripping Waris naked and attempting to set fire to his body. <sup>83</sup>
May 2023	In May 2023, Muslim leader <i>Nigar Alam</i> was attacked and beaten to death after he allegedly "passed some blasphemous remarks that angered people" while speaking at a political rally. Authorities had attempted to provide security to Alam and ushered him into a store but a crowd gathered and broke into the building before carrying out the lynching. <sup>84</sup>
May 2023	In May 2023, Christian woman <i>Musarrat Bibi</i> and her coworker, Muslim man <i>Muhammad Sarmad</i> , were arrested on charges of committing blasphemy based on accusations of burning pages of the Qur'an. However, Bibi and Sarmad were acting according to instructions from the school's administration to clean the facility storage room, where they subsequently decluttered wastepaper and burned it along with other refuse. Some students were alarmed and perturbed by the burned pages, though the majority of school staff assured that Bibi and Sarmad were simply and harmlessly following orders from superiors and that they did not intentionally desecrate holy scripture - as both defendants are illiterate and therefore unable to discern what paper was inappropriate to burn. However, four days after the incident which caused some students and teachers to be agitated, a local resident of Arifwala filed a complaint with the police accusing Bibi of committing blasphemy, and he assembled an angry mob outside of the school where she was employed. The accuser did not identify Sarmad as an offender but authorities traced him to the same incident and arrested him in addition to Bibi. Both were charged with blasphemy but were granted bail two days later. <sup>85</sup>
May 2023	In May 2023, a Muslim cleric and member of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) political party, <i>Maulana Nigar Alam</i> , was dragged out of protective police custody and beaten to death by an angry mob who had accused him of blasphemy for his remarks that "Imran Khan [leader of PTI and former Prime Minister of Pakistan] is a truthful person and I respect him like the Prophet". <sup>86</sup>
August 2023	In August 2023, a group of unidentified men shot and killed 22-year-old English teacher <i>Abdul Rauf</i> while he was traveling to attend a "jirga," a forum for resolving disputes. Days earlier, language students accused Rauf of committing blasphemy during one of his

<sup>80</sup> Ayaz Gul, "[Mob Kills Alleged Blasphemer in Pakistan](#)", *Voice of America*, 13 February 2022.

<sup>81</sup> Al Jazeera, "[Pakistani teacher killed for alleged blasphemy: Police](#)", 30 March 2022.

<sup>82</sup> Firstpost, "[WATCH: Hindu man falsely accused of blasphemy escapes lynching in Pakistan's Hyderabad](#)", 22 August 2022.

<sup>83</sup> Haroon Janjua, "[Mob storms Pakistan police station and lynches man accused of blasphemy](#)", *The Guardian*, 12 February 2023. ; Al Jazeera, "[Angry mob lynches man accused of blasphemy in Pakistan](#)", 11 February 2023.

<sup>84</sup> Al Jazeera, "[Pakistani man lynched over alleged blasphemy remarks during rally](#)", 7 May 2023.

<sup>85</sup> Morning Star News, "[Christian Widow Accused of Blasphemy Released on Bail](#)", 15 May 2023.

<sup>86</sup> Asian News International, "[Pakistan: Blasphemy killing of PTI-affiliated cleric controversial](#)", 8 May 2023.

lessons. When he was summoned to the center to discuss the issue with Muslim scholars he insisted that he did not intentionally make blasphemous remarks and apologized for “any objectionable words”. Rauf was murdered days later while responding to calls from clerics to visit a madrassa to partake in a jirga.<sup>87</sup>

### Concerns Regarding Coerced Conversions and Forced Marriages of Religious Minority Women and Girls

Many cases are reported in Pakistan in which predominantly juvenile girls from religious minority communities are kidnapped, forcibly converted to Islam, and married off to Muslim men, usually the very same perpetrators of their abductions.<sup>88</sup> While “forced conversion” is not an offense in Pakistan, abduction and forced marriage are both criminal offenses. There is a strong correlation between reports of forced conversion and child marriage; however, the legal framework of the Child Marriage Restraint Act varies in different administrative units of Pakistan. In Sindh province, the legal age for marriage is 18 years for both men and women. In the rest of the country, the minimum legal age for marriage is 16 years for girls and 18 years for boys. According to law, it is a criminal offense to solemnize the marriage of children, for adults to marry children, for parents or guardians to facilitate such marriages, and for officials to formalize child marriages; however, the law fails to expressly state that child marriages are considered null and void.

The perpetrators mostly manipulate the law and justice system to get away with their crimes due to the absence of legislation which deals with forced faith conversions, and the lack of enforcement of existing domestic law; this remains a key impediment in preventing such harmful and inhumane practices. Reports reveal that forced conversions and child marriages of minority girls are not only facilitated by religious clerics and police, but also validated by the courts. Although forced conversion constitutes an egregious violation of human rights and severely restricts the right to religious freedom, Pakistani authorities deny the existence of such practices and claim all conversions to Islam to be willful. The following incidents directly disprove these claims and constitute only a small fraction of the hundreds and thousands of cases of abductions, conversions, and child marriages.

<i>Mashal Rafique Masih</i> 17 years old Christian	January 2021	Kidnapped in Rawalpindi. Her father reported the incident to the police who mocked him and declined to take action.
<i>Neena Kumari</i> Hindu	February 2021	Failed to return home from school one day, and her family later learned that policeman Ghulam Maroof Qadri abducted Neena, forced her to convert to Islam, renamed her ‘Maria’, and then married her in Karachi, 400 kilometers away from her home.
<i>Shakaina Masih</i> 13 years old Christian	February 2021	Johnson and Samina Masih received news that their daughter Shakaina, who had been missing for a month, had been abducted, converted to Islam and married to a Muslim man.
<i>Reena Meghwar</i> Hindu	February 2021	Abducted from Keriogjar, Badar, forcibly converted to Islam, and married to her kidnapper Muhammad Qasim.
<i>Sawera Khalid</i> 13 years old Christian	February 2021	Kidnapped by a Muslim man in Lahore and forced to convert to Islam by a Muslim man. She was rescued and returned to her family.
<i>Kavita Oad</i> 13 years old	March 2021	Kidnapped and forcibly converted to Islam in Sindh Province by Islamic cleric Mian Mithoo.

<sup>87</sup> Asian News International, “Pakistan: Teacher shot dead on blasphemy allegation in southern Balochistan”, 7 August 2023.

<sup>88</sup> Jubilee Campaign, [Abduction, Conversion, & Child Marriage of Religious Minority Girls in Pakistan: 2022 Update](#), January 2022. ; Jubilee Campaign, [Conversion Without Consent](#), November 2022.

Hindu		
<i>Sunaina James Masih</i> 15 years old Christian	March 2021	Abducted from Gujranwala, forcibly converted to Islam, and married to Muhammad Frasat. Sunaina's mother is still lobbying authorities to investigate the case and rescue Sunaina.
<i>Beenish Javaid</i> Christian	March 2021	Kidnapped by Muhammad Ramzan and forced to convert to Islam and marry her perpetrator; she was rescued within six days.
<i>Kiran Bashir</i> 17 years old Christian	March 2021	Abducted by a Muslim man who converted her to Islam and married her against her will, after which an FIR was lodged at the local police station. Regrettably, the court permitted the abductor to maintain custody of Kiran.
<i>Pooja Maghwar</i> 13 years old	March 2021	Abducted while she was returning home from work in Sindh province's Tando Jam town. Fortunately, Pooja was soon rescued by police, at which point they learned that she was forcibly converted to Islam and married against her will.
<i>Neha Rifaqat Masih</i> 14 years old Christian	April 2021	Kidnapped, raped, forcibly converted to Islam, and married to 45-year-old married Muslim man Muhammad Tayyab. Neha was rescued but was not returned to her family; rather, she was sent to a women's shelter home.
<i>Nayab Gill</i> 13 years old Christian	May 2021	Kidnapped in Punjab by a Muslim man named Saddam who was already married with four daughters, Nayab was additionally forced to marry him against her will and convert to Islam.
<i>Elisha</i> 9 years old	July 2021	Was alone at home when 45-year-old Muslim man Babar forcefully entered the home, beat, and raped Elisha.
<i>Chashman Kanwal</i> 14 years old Christian	July 2021	Christian rickshaw driver Gulzar Masih reported to the police that his daughter Chashman had gone missing after he went to pick her up from school and was unable to find her. Days later, Chashman's kidnapper sent her family a video in which she claimed that she had converted to Islam willingly and that she had changed her name to Aisha Bibi.
<i>Simran Iqbal Masih</i> 15 years old <i>Sheeza Ghafoor</i> 14 years old Christian	July 2021	Kidnapped at gunpoint by Muslim man Ali Raza in Faisalabad. An FIR was filed at the local police station.
<i>Reena Nazir</i> 17 years old Christian	July 2021	Abducted in Faisalabad by Muhammad Waqas and two accomplices.
<i>Princy Francis</i> 14 years old Christian	August 2021	Abducted by Muslim man Akhtar Shah for the purpose of forcible religious conversion and marriage. Nine days later, Princy was rescued and sent to a woman's shelter, and her perpetrators were convicted.
<i>Muqdas Nadeem</i> 16 years old Christian	August 2021	Was at home with her 12-year-old sister Mehwish when a group of six Muslim men led by Muhammad Azeem forced themselves into the home armed with guns, beat the two girls, then kidnapped the elder and dragged her onto the street.
<i>Chatro Bheel</i> 15 years old Hindu	August 2021	Radical Muslim man Muhammad Ali Nawaz entered the home of Hindu man Mangal Bheel, physically assaulted him, and abducted his 15-year-old daughter Chatro.



<i>Liza Younus</i> 8 years old	September 2021	Kidnapped and raped by 20-year-old Muslim neighbor Muhammad Bota; after committing the sexual assault, Bota attempted to kill Liza by hitting her with a stone and leaving her unconscious on the ground outside before fleeing. Liza's family found her on the street in poor condition and took her for an examination at Sahiwal Hospital which confirmed she was raped. Authorities have arrested Bota and he is liable to punishment of between 10 and 25 years in prison. Liza survived and is undergoing mental and physical rehabilitation in recovery.
<i>Misbah Imdad</i> 17 years old Christian	October 2021	Had gone into hiding with her family in Faisalabad after receiving threats of abduction and forced marriage from Muslim man Muhammad Saqib.
<i>Roshini Meghwar</i> 13 years old Hindu	October 2021	Had been kidnapped and married to a Muslim man, Mohammad Moosa, who is more than double her age.
<i>Meerab Abbas</i> 12 years old Christian	November 2021	Went missing and it was revealed later that she had been kidnapped by 22-year-old Muslim man Muhammad Daud, transported from Sahiwal to Balochistan, and forced to convert to Islam and marry Daud.
<i>Mahnour Ashraf</i> 14 years old Pentecostal Christian	January 2022	Abducted by 45-year-old Muslim neighbor Muhammad Ali Khan Ghauri. The family unsuccessfully attempted to rescue Mahnour, and days later they received news that she had converted to Islam and that Ghauri fabricated a marriage certificate claiming her to be 19 years old.
<i>Najma Kolhi</i> Hindu	January 2022	Abducted and forcibly married to Muslim man Amanullah, who forced Kolhi to convert to Islam and change her name to Fatima.
<i>Persicla Dilawar</i> 15 years old Christian	March 2022	Abducted by Muslim man Muhammad Qasim in the middle of the night. Qasim threatened Persicla's parents with death if they reported the incident. Consequently, Qasim forcibly married Persicla.
<i>Zarvia Parvaiz</i> 13 years old Christian	April 2022	Abducted from Rawalpindi, forcibly converted to Islam, and married off to Muslim man Imran Shahzad. Zarvia's family's petition for her rescue was rejected as she gave a statement in court - under duress - in favor of the perpetrator. In November 2022, authorities re-investigated the case and rescued Zarvia to reunite her with her family. She has since testified to the following human rights violations committed upon her by her captor: forced ingestion of drugs and alcohol; rape; sodomy; starvation; physical assault; forced physical labor; burns inflicted by cigarettes; and electrocution.
<i>Saba Masih</i> 15 years old Roman Catholic	May 2022	Abducted by her family's adult Muslim neighbor, Muhammad Yasir, who subsequently forced her to convert to Islam and marry.
<i>Meerab Palous</i> 15 years old Christian	June 2022	Abducted from her home by a Muslim family friend and neighbor who drugged her and forced her into a car. Meerab's parents were informed the following morning that she was in the process of accepting Islam and marrying the perpetrator.
<i>Hoorab Masih</i> 13 years old Christian	December 2022	Was abducted by Muslim shop owner Muhammad Usman when she visited the store in which he worked so that she could purchase groceries for her family. Hoorab was raped, converted to Islam, and forcibly married to Usman. In February, the perpetrator was apprehended and Hoorab was rescued.
<i>Sitara Gill</i> 15 years old	December 2022	Kidnapped by Muslim man Rana Tayyab, husband of the school principal of a Muslim school where Sitara was employed as a domestic

Christian		worker. The perpetrator's wife used her government connections to prevent police from filing a case. Two months after the abduction, a lawyer from the Minorities Alliance Pakistan pressured the authorities to file a case, but the kidnappers have provided fraudulent conversion and marriage certificates.
<i>Suhana Kumar</i> 14 years old Hindu	June 2023	Was kidnapped at gunpoint by three armed men, Akhtar Gabol, Faizan Jat, and Sarang Khaskheli, forcibly converted to Islam, and married to one of the perpetrators.

In its December 2022 State party report to the Human Rights Committee<sup>89</sup>, Pakistan asserts that “126. The State of Pakistan and its criminal justice system is vigilant in respect of forced conversions and marriages and if any individual case is reported by media or through aggrieved parties, institutional mechanisms and courts take the matter very seriously and conduct proper administrative and judicial enquiries to ensure justice. However the plethora of cases in which the abductions, coerced faith conversions, and child marriages of Hindu and Christian girls in Pakistan are negligibly investigated and prosecuted prove this claim to be untruthful.

Whilst all citizens in Pakistan face obstacles in access to justice, minority religious groups face even greater difficulties in the pursuit of justice. The police often turn a blind eye to reports of abduction and forced conversions, thereby creating impunity for perpetrators. The police forces, which are overwhelmingly Muslim, generally sympathize with the goal of converting religious minorities to Islam. In limited instances of police intervention, local leaders exert considerable pressure to prevent any action.<sup>90</sup> A 2022 study conducted by Voice for Justice and Jubilee Campaign made the following observations:

- Police appear to be biased and reluctant to even register cases and investigate allegations of forced conversion. Problems also occur with how the case is registered, the recording of the victim's statements, and incorrect charge sheets. In the case of abducted 14-year-old Christian girl Chashman Kanwal, police tricked the victim's illiterate father into signing a form claiming that Chashman's age was 17 years. In multiple cases - such as Sania Lateef, Malaika Sabir, Sara Aslam Masih, Samra Munir - even though cases were filed at the police station by relatives of the kidnapped girls, authorities failed to investigate circumstances and rescue victims.
- Judges and court officials are willing to accept fraudulent documentation that portray the girl victims as adults or having reached the age of menarche - at which point a girl is deemed legally marriageable according to Sharia - and as willing converts to Islam. Similarly, judges disregard evidence provided by victims' families which expose the criminality of the acts of faith conversion and marriage upon minors. In the case of Christian girl Zarvia Parvaiz, the judge accepted fake conversion and marriage certificates and declined to review phone call transcripts between Zarvia and her parents in which she reveals that she was kidnapped and forced into Muslim faith and child marriage against her will.

#### IV. Suggested questions for the Islamic Republic of Pakistan

1. Please provide information on steps taken to reevaluate the non-compliance of national legislation with obligations pursuant to international conventions and covenants. This includes Articles 295 through 298 of Pakistan's Penal Code of 1860 which criminalize acts of alleged blasphemy and which are therefore in contravention of Article 19 of the present Covenant (see General Comment No. 34; para 48.) Furthermore, provide

<sup>89</sup> *Supra* note 9.

<sup>90</sup> Reuben Ackerman, [Forced Conversions & Forced Marriages in Sindh, Pakistan](#), Commonwealth Initiative for Freedom of Religion or Belief, The University of Birmingham, 2018.

information on any steps taken, if any, to align national legislation with international human rights obligations, whether it be via repeal, amendment, revision, etc.;

- a. Until an agreeable resolution can be achieved, enact reforms to: (1) make blasphemy a bailable offense, (2) make the provision of evidence by accusers a prerequisite to detention and formal blasphemy charges; and (3) allow investigatory authorities to dismiss unfounded and baseless accusations;
2. Please clarify what measures have been taken, if any, to abolish the death penalty for non-violent conduct - such as blasphemy, apostasy, drug trafficking, and adultery - which do not constitute the “most serious crimes” for which capital punishment may qualify as a proportionate penalty;
  3. Please explain what measures have been taken, if any, to provide protection and security to individuals who, on the grounds of their expression of religious/non-religious belief, are at risk of violations of their right to freedom from arbitrary deprivation of life, such as individuals accused of blasphemy;
  4. Please provide information on what progress has been made as regards conducting proper investigations into the circumstances surrounding the abduction, forced religious conversion, and child marriage of faith minority girls, particularly when conditions of coercion or fraudulent documentation are present;
    - a. Please clarify what improvements have been made - if any - to ensure and expedite the rescue of girl victims and prosecution of perpetrators;
    - b. How is the Government of Pakistan working to ensure that the Child Marriage Restraint Act is respected without discrimination to religion or belief?