



GLOBAL
HUMAN
RIGHTS
DEFENCE

Annual
Human Rights
Report 2012

Pakistan

Case number: 224
Country: Pakistan
Type of Violation: Blasphemy
Acts:
Submitted to GHRD:
Date of Submission to GHRD:
GHRD Contact:
Investigation conducted by:

1. Identity of the victim(s):

Name:
Age at time of event:
Under 18:
Citizenship:
Religion:
Ethnicity:
Caste:
Home address:
Consent:

2. Date and place of event:

Date:
Location:

3. Alleged perpetrator(s):

(1)

4. Legal status:

[case referred to court yes: provide info]

5. Case Summary (What occurred, how)

“Increased sectarian violence, coupled with political instability and the pervasive influence of terrorist groups in society all contributed to a culture of extremism throughout Pakistan.”

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Summary

In 2012 increased sectarian violence, coupled with political instability and the pervasive influence of terrorist groups in society all contributed to a culture of extremism throughout Pakistan. Lack of the rule of law, police corruption, impunity and state tolerance of persecution at all levels of authority (government, executive, judiciary and law enforcers alike) continued to give cause for concern on minority rights.

During 2012, the blasphemy laws continued to be used as a tool by society to target religious minorities. The poorly drafted legislation enables police and individuals to abuse the laws, incarcerating individuals indefinitely on the basis of hearsay and without evidence. Abductions, forced marriage and forced conversion continued to place minority girls in danger and the migration of Hindus seeking refuge across the border in India exemplifies the severity of the situation for minorities. Those who dared to speak out or act in defence of human rights were targeted for their courage.

Human Rights groups have also been calling 2012 a 'deadly year for Shias' with estimates that more than 300 Shias were killed during the year. Only one day before the new year, nineteen people were killed after a bomb struck two buses carrying Shia Muslims in southwest Balochistan province. In August, gunmen dressed as Pakistani security officials stopped a bus traveling from Rawalpindi to the northwestern Gilgit region and dragged the passengers off the bus. The gunmen asked the passengers to show their identity cards and then shot 22 Shiites at point blank range. It was the third such incident in six months.

Top down discrimination in the Constitution of Pakistan¹, various laws and the education curriculum combined with a lack of investigation and prosecution of hate crimes has left religious minority groups in Pakistan (Christians, Hindus, Ahmadiyyas, Shias, Sikhs, Bahai) unprotected and effectively second class citizens.

With uncertainty surrounding upcoming elections in 2013, continuing violence, and a government unable or unwilling to act to protect minorities; their stability and safety is of increased concern. Without real change and commitment at the State level to protect minorities; corruption, impunity and discrimination continues to filter down to the everyday level. Weak legal procedures and impunity for violence against the most discriminated means that the most vulnerable are the least likely to receive the protection they need.

¹ Article 2 of the Constitution declares Islam as the State religion and Article 41 states that only a Muslim can become President of the country. Article 260(3) of the Constitution makes a distinction between "Muslims" and "non Muslims" (the provision refers to the latter being Christian, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Parsi, 'Qadani' or 'Lahori' groups who call themselves Ahmadis, and Bahai), effectively relegating religious minorities to a status as second class citizens. Sections 298B and 298C of the Pakistan Penal Code ("PPC") refer specifically to Ahmadis, prohibiting them from calling themselves Muslims and using Muslim practices in worship or in the propagation of their faith.

Violence against Religious Minority Communities

Religious minority communities, businesses, homes and places of worship continued to be vulnerable to attacks, violence, and boycotts in 2012.² Incitement to violence, for example over mosque loudspeakers, was fuelled by religious extremism and societal pressure. Inadequate investigation and prosecution of such abuses during 2012 left targeted communities in fear for their lives and without their possessions and homes, allowing the perpetrators of these violent crimes to benefit from full impunity. The inability and unwillingness of authorities to adequately respond to such large-scale attacks against minority communities indicates weak governance and lack of control from the state apparatus.

Universal Periodic Review (UPR), October 2012

Pakistan was reviewed for the second time during the October Universal Periodic Review at the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva. The government delegation headed by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Hina Rabbani Khar, painted a positive picture for human rights in Pakistan. The delegation used the challenges of terrorism, religious extremism and natural disaster as key reasons for the lack of progress on human rights.

The current Minister for interfaith harmony, Paul Bhatti, argued that the presence of an extremist ideology and mindset in Pakistan has led to insecurity for minority communities. He further stated that the government of Pakistan “condemns all acts that restrict freedom of religion”. The Minister however, failed to provide a concrete plan for protecting religious minorities—effectively failing to put words into action.

The overly optimistic picture of progress presented by the government has only increased concern for minorities living in Pakistan, with the government failing to even acknowledge many of the human rights challenges they face nor provide a concrete plan of action for protecting them.



² Pakistan was ranked as the 6th worst country for religious minorities in Minority Rights Groups ‘Peoples most under threat’ 2012 list. <http://www.minorityrights.org/11337/peoples-under-threat/peoples-under-threat-2012.html>

Case examples



Burned debris of the church compound following the mob attack in Mardan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

Ransacking of church compound in Mardan, September, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

On the 21st of September, a church compound in the city of Mardan was attacked and burnt by a mob of Muslim men who apparently executed the attack in reaction to the anti-Islamic film 'Innocence of Muslims'.

Hundreds of men tore down the main gate of the church and burned the Church compound along with St. Paul's High School, a library, a computer laboratory and the houses of four clergymen. The mob also vandalised a car and three motorcycles belonging to the church compound. The 17 year old son of one of the clergymen was hospitalised after being brutally beaten. Police authorities and fire fighters arrived at the compound after the attacks began but did not take action due to the size of the mob.

An executive member of the church committee stated that he saw:

"Hundreds of protestors with rifles, steel bars, bats and kerosene oil gathered in front of the church. The mob damaged the church gate while trying to get in. The aggression of the group was growing; after a few attempts the doors were broken down and people were rushing inside. The mob first looted the valuable belongings, tore the copies of Bibles and prayer materials and then set the church on fire."

Mob attack on Ahmadiyya mosque in Rawalpindi, February, Punjab province

Around 500 angry protesters surrounded an Ahmadiyya place of worship in Rawalpindi in February 2012, demanding the Ahmadiyyas to take down their CCTV's, safety barriers and other security measures. Loudspeakers projecting threats against the Ahmadiyya community were heard in the locality while police stood by, failing to disperse the angry crowd.

Police authorities gave in to the mob's demands, requiring the Ahmadiyyas to take down their security equipment. According to the Ahmadiyya community spokesperson, the community was originally advised by local law enforcement agencies to implement the security measures for their safety, but was promptly told to take down the measures when the police authorities tried to appease the mob.



Sectarian violence or target killings?

Three Questions to... **Senge H. Sering**

Human Rights groups have been calling 2012 a 'deadly year for Shias' with estimates that more than 300 Shias were killed during the year in what is being popularly termed as 'sectarian' violence between Sunni and Shia Muslims.

GHRD spoke with Senge H. Sering, President of the Institute for Gilgit Baltistan Studies, based in Washington DC about violence in Pakistan's Northwest province of Gilgit Baltistan.

What do you think is the most burning issue in Pakistan?

I work in a particular region in the North of Pakistan called Gilgit Baltistan; that region is a disputed area between India and Pakistan, it is a UN declared disputed area. Local people do not have access to Pakistan's constitutional benefits like: the political system, judiciary and socio-economic institutions. Therefore, local people cannot really participate in the Pakistani system. That's the most pressing issue. Lack of political, cultural, economic, religious rights and control over their land have led to social disorder and discrimination.

Which minorities suffer from these persecutions?

We have ethnic minorities as well as religious minorities. All the people living in that area speak languages which have no connection to other Pakistani languages. We speak Tibetan, Tacik, Burushaski and Dardik languages connected to Rajasthan and Kashmir. In the Pakistani political framework these languages are not recognised so the persecution exists because local languages are disappearing, they are on the verge of extinction.

On the religious minorities' side, we have the Shias, Sufis, and Ismailis. These minorities cannot learn about their own religion in the schools. Now the Pakistani government is making some effort to change its school syllabus which has been based on extremist ideology; in the past people who did not believe in jihad for instance, they were forced to be taught about that.

Do you think that religious extremism is on the rise in Pakistan?

So far in Pakistan more than 10,000 Shias have been killed. In Parachinar valley more than 4000 Shias were killed. People are pulled down from the buses, their identity cards are checked, their names are different than the Sunni names [so they are easily identified] and they get killed and raped; women have been threaten and molested. The reason why these things are happening I believe is not a sectarian issue.

Shias live in very strategically located areas in Pakistan where any state apparatus whether its military, paramilitary or secret services want maximum control. If you look at the last 60 years, the Christians, Hindus Ahmadis and Shias, they have never attacked the Sunnis. It is just one way traffic, these groups always get attacked and they are always on the run to save their lives when they get attacked by the militants. So it is not a sectarian issue, it is targeted killing; it is a type of killing that is supported by the Pakistani military and intelligence agencies. Whenever somebody attacks Shias and kills them, the attackers take protection in the military cantonments and they never get prosecuted in the courts, Secondly I believe that, it is not the general Sunni population that is attacking the minorities. It is a very clear situation that the militants are involved in the target killings.

Blasphemy Laws

The blasphemy laws continue to be used in Pakistan as a tool to persecute religious minorities and have been a pretext for growing religious extremism and vigilantism in 2012.³

While the blasphemy laws apply to members of minority religious communities and majority Muslims alike, they are commonly used as a tool to target religious minorities, particularly Ahmadiyyas, Christians and Hindus.⁴

The government of Pakistan continues to deny that the blasphemy laws disproportionately target religious minorities and refuses to review the discriminatory laws.

Following riots and demonstrations in 2011 relating to the case of Asia Bibi, the first woman to be sentenced to death under s295C of the Pakistani Penal Code, the government publicly announced on December 30, 2011 that it had “no intention” to repeal or amend the law.⁶

Universal Periodic Review (UPR), October 2012

Over 20 peer states called for the government of Pakistan to protect religious minorities during the UPR of Pakistan, with over 13 making specific recommendations to the government to either review or repeal the blasphemy laws in accordance with the government’s international commitments.

The Pakistani delegation failed to acknowledge that the law was used to target religious minorities, stating that the majority of those prosecuted under the law in the past four years were Muslim and arguing that there is an international “misunderstanding” of blasphemy law – that it is intended for all Pakistani citizens.⁷ The delegation also made reference to the blasphemy case of Rimsha Masih (*see page 9*), citing it as a positive example of government intervention in relation to the blasphemy laws, as it was the first time that a person accused was immediately released on bail and also the first time the accuser was also arrested. However, the international attention and furore that gave rise to government intervention only exemplifies how easily the legal system can be manipulated by those in power.

“ Non-Muslims, who equate to 4 percent of Pakistan’s population, make up 57 percent of those charged with blasphemy.”

³A series of provisions in the PPC introduced in the 1980s which punish those who “by words or visible representation or by an imputation or insinuation, directly or indirectly, defile the name of the Hazrat Muhammad”. Under these laws, anyone accused as a blasphemer against the Holy Quran can be awarded sentences up to life imprisonment or even death under section 295C of the PPC.

⁴United States Commission on Religious Freedom, USCIRF Annual Report 2012 – Countries of Particular Concern: Pakistan, 20 March 2012, available at” <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4f71a674c.html> [last seen on 4 April 2012]. According to the USCIRF the law has “a greater impact per capita on minority religious faiths” and “the law has created a climate of vigilantism that has resulted in societal actors killing accused individuals”. According to the National Commission for Justice and Peace, in the last 25 years, 1058 cases of blasphemy have been registered in Pakistan. Of those accused, 456 were Ahmadiyya, 449 were Muslim, 133 were Christian, and 21 were Hindu.

⁵National Commission for Justice and Peace

⁶The announcement followed mass public demonstrations relating to the case of Asia Bibi, the first woman to be sentenced to death under s295C of the Pakistani Penal Code (on 8 November 2010).

⁷ Stated by Paul Bhatti, Minister for interfaith harmony during the Universal Periodic Review of Pakistan, October 2012.



Key Concerns with the Blasphemy Laws:

- ◆ No proof of intent required.
- ◆ Maximum sentence is the death sentence or life imprisonment.
- ◆ People can be charged with blasphemy on the basis of hearsay and can immediately be taken into police custody.
- ◆ No evidence is required following any accusations of blasphemy, often leading to false or frivolous accusations.
- ◆ Accused individuals are imprisoned without adequate investigation or proof and many spend years incarcerated without trial.
- ◆ The law only deals with blasphemy against Islam, it does not include offences for blasphemy against other religions.
- ◆ Religious extremists abuse the laws - societal actors who take the law into their own hands have killed a large number of accused individuals.

BLASPHEM

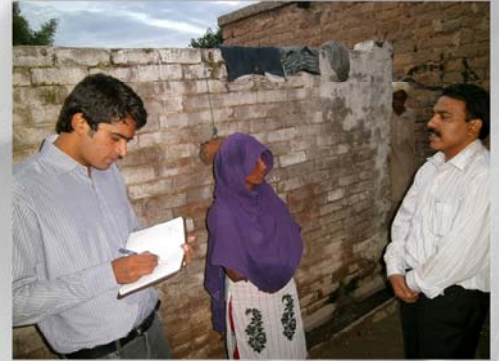
Blasphemy charges laid against Rimsha Masih, August, Islamabad

The most highly reported blasphemy case in 2012 was the case of Rimsha Masih, a young girl from Islamabad who was arrested on blasphemy charges in August and incarcerated for three weeks after an angry mob surrounded her family home and demanded her punishment for allegedly burning pages of a Quran.

The case grabbed the attention of international media with an unusual twist on September 2nd, when a Muslim cleric from Umara Jaffar was arrested on charges of evidence tampering for placing a number of burned pages of the Quran in Rimsha's bag.

Government influence in the case resulted in Rimsha being granted bail on September 7th and relocated to an undisclosed location. The complicated case continues, and recently on the 1st of October three witnesses withdrew their testimonies against the Muslim cleric.

The case is the first example where someone accused of blasphemy in Pakistan has been released and where the accuser was also arrested.



GHRD investigated the case of Rimsha Masih. GHRD's partner in Islamabad spoke with members of Rimsha's community, the police officers in charge of her case and Rimsha's aunt Ms. Gulzari.

Other recent case examples:

- ◆ *October:* A 16 year old Christian boy from Karachi, Ryan Stanten, was charged with blasphemy for a text message sent from his cell phone. An angry mob burnt his belongings on the street.
- ◆ *September:* A Muslim shopkeeper, Haji Nasrullah, was accused of blasphemy for refusing to close his shop during a demonstration against the anti-Islam film 'Innocence of Muslims'.
- ◆ *August:* An Ahmadiyya man, Muhammad Ashraf, was charged with blasphemy for displaying a Quranic text in his shop and allegedly posing as a Muslim.

Extremism, minorities, and upcoming elections:

Three Questions to... Sameena Imtiaz

Pakistan's nascent democracy will be tested soon with upcoming elections in 2013. GHRD asked Sameena Imtiaz, founder and the Executive Director of the Peace Education and Development (PEAD) Foundation what she thought the outlook was for minorities and human rights defenders in light of upcoming elections.



What do you think is the most challenging issue in Pakistan?

There are several actually but the most challenging for Pakistan at the moment is increasing extremism. The militant Islamic groups are challenging the government; they are attacking government institutions, they have people within the security agencies. Pakistan has become a "sanctuary" not only for the Pakistani Taliban but also for Jihadi militants [who were active in Afghanistan]. Pakistan partnered with USA for the war against terror and these militants turned against the State of Pakistan itself. This contributes to the increased vulnerability of minority groups that are in Pakistan, particularly those groups that represent other faiths and beliefs. Christians, Ahmadis and Hindus are particularly under threat.

What is the most horrific discrimination you have witnessed against minorities in Pakistan?

I can talk about the case of Rimsha Masih. A poor Christian girl who is only 11 years old who has down-syndrome. A child who has never been to school and despite all the above, she is being accused of blasphemy. She spent three weeks in the lock up. The government claimed that she was jailed in order to provide her "protection". The young girl was not even allowed to see her family for days. Those who had accused her were caught but later bailed out by the court. The majority of these blasphemy cases are fabricated. The real causes behind these charges are often land grabbing issues, personal disputes etc. The law is being thoroughly abused by people who are settling their personal grudges and scores with religious minorities in the country. Also, many Muslims are being falsely implicated in blasphemy cases therefore this law must be repealed or thoroughly reviewed.

In addition, the Ahmadi community in particular has been a victim of violence in the country. They are being killed and their religious places and graves are being desecrated by religio-militant groups.

How does the future look like for minorities in Pakistan if you consider the upcoming the elections?

I think the future is not very good, unless we try to change certain legislations which are discriminatory against minorities. For instance the blasphemy laws, if we do not repeal them or if we do not change the laws, these minorities will still be persecuted. If we do not control this increasing extremism in Pakistan, I think minorities will still be under threat. If we do not bring peace and harmony into the country, we cannot expect change. So therefore there has to be a short term policy and there has to be a long term policy as well. The short term is that you somehow try to bring these militant groups under control. The long term is that you change the policy for minorities in Pakistan, better legislation, better protection for them - only then can we ensure them their full rights.

Discrimination against Religious Minorities in Sindh Province



In August 2012, Pakistani authorities detained over 200 Pakistani Hindu pilgrims from entering India at Wagah Border, Lahore, following reports that they were planning to migrate to India to escape their situation in Sindh province.⁸ Attention from international media highlighted the human rights situation for Hindus in Pakistan, with the Daily Times (Pakistan) reporting that around 7,000 to 10,000 Pakistani Hindus (around 1,600 families) left the country in the last two years with around 450 families migrating to India during the period May – August 2012.⁹

GHRD's partners travelled to Karachi, Sindh Province, to discuss the human rights issues Hindu minorities are facing which are leading them to attempt to cross the border into India. Key issues discussed included the extreme poverty experienced by Hindu communities and the prevalence of feudalism and bonded labour, particularly within the agricultural industry. Interviewees also discussed a variety of other issues faced by the Hindu community including the kidnapping of Hindu businessmen for ransom, the high number of abductions, rape, forced marriage and conversion to Islam of young Hindu girls, attacks against businesses and places of worship and embedded social discrimination in schools.




GHRD's partners spoke with members of the Hindu community in Karachi, Sindh province.



⁸"Hindu pilgrims allowed to cross border after protest", The Express Tribune, 10 August 2012 (last seen on 26 November 2012): <http://tribune.com.pk/story/420203/100-hindu-pilgrims-stopped-at-wagah-over-clearance-issue/>

⁹"A tale of migrating Hindus", Daily Times, 20 August 2012 (last seen on 26 November 2012): http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2012%5C08%5C20%5Cstory_20-8-2012_pg7_10



“ Migration is not a solution. We are expecting and hoping that the government will come with a practical solution to our problems. ”

Hindu woman (name undisclosed),
Dhobi Ghat, Karachi,
Sindh Province.

Abductions, Forced Conversions and Sexual Violence against Minority Women

The issues of abduction, early and forced marriage and forced conversion have gained increased attention in 2012, with several states making recommendations to the government of Pakistan to initiate efforts to adequately investigate and prosecute such cases during the UPR of Pakistan, particularly cases of early and forced marriage.¹⁰

The issue received particular media attention in 2012 with the case of Rinkle Kumari, a 17 year old Hindu girl from Mirpur Mathelo, Sindh province, whose family claimed she was forcibly abducted from her family home in February, allegedly with the support of powerful politicians from the Pakistan People's party. The case was controversial for many reasons – the age and consent of the girl was widely disputed and the Hindu community argued local influential politicians were involved in the case. Chief Justice Iftexhar Choudhary sent Rinkle to a 'shelter home' (Darul Aman), before recording her final statement. Three weeks later, following public allegations of harassment and torture during her stay, Chief Justice Choudhary allowed a recorded statement as evidence of her willingness to convert and marry, rather than recording the statement in his own presence in court. The marriage was upheld amid rumours that she was intimidated and Rinkle Kumari has not been seen by her family or community since.

The case demonstrates the vast complexity surrounding marriage and conversion of minority girls and the lack of safeguards and processes in place to protect against forced or early marriage and forced conversion.

“ Tell me, in Pakistani law is kidnapping not a crime? Will all your crimes wash away if she converts to Islam? At least the police should investigate kidnapping cases and punish the kidnapper according to the law.”

Caretaker, Ratneswar Mahdev Temple, Karachi, Sindh.

¹⁰ Thailand, Belgium, Canada, Chad, Denmark and Japan all made recommendations on forced conversion and/or forced and early marriage.



“ According to Islamic law, any previous marriage under the Christian or Hindu marriage Act can be immediately dissolved upon marriage to a Muslim man as the woman has embraced Islam, and this prevails. If the first husband is non-Muslim, then the marriage is immediately annulled by her de facto acceptance of Islam.”

Minority women of lower castes are particularly vulnerable to kidnapping and forced conversion due to perceptions that they are ‘sexually available’ by men of Muslim dominated communities. In Friday sermons at mosques, Muslim men are encouraged to convert Hindu and Christian women to Islam by marrying them.¹¹ The issue is further complicated by cultural norms (such as the practice of arranged marriage) and legal issues, such as the lack of legal divorce available to minorities. According to Islamic law, any previous marriage under the Christian or Hindu marriage Act can be immediately dissolved upon marriage to a Muslim man as the woman has embraced Islam; and this prevails. If the first husband is non-Muslim, then the marriage is immediately annulled by her de facto acceptance of Islam.¹² Such complications make it difficult to determine whether marriage was by conversion or free will. Nevertheless, sexual violence, kidnapping and conversion cases are repeatedly reported to the police, in the news and by human rights organizations, and are not adequately investigated or punished.

In the case of kidnappings, many adhere to a similar pattern, whereby a young Christian or Hindu girl is kidnapped and isolated from her family, friends and community elders, and coerced to testify in court that she willingly converted to Islam and this is where the cases are left.¹³ Often coercion and intimidation by the police and the girl’s captors give her no choice but to testify that she willingly converted. In the majority of cases observed, the girl is not allowed to see her family, friends, or her community elders and is accompanied by her captors at every moment. As a consequence, she is subject to intimidation, sexual violence and rape.

The numbers reported vary and are dependent on whether the women or their families publicly report the cases. However, NGO reports estimate that over 1000 Hindu and Christian women and girls are kidnapped and forced to convert to Islam every year.¹⁴

¹¹ Jinnah Institute; A question of faith: A report on the Status of Religious Minorities in Pakistan, 2011, p55.

¹² There have been calls for new legislative measures to be taken to end forced conversions: the most public calls have come from DrAzraFazl, Member of Parliament and sister of President Asif Ali Zadari. There is also a bill on Hindu marriage currently being debated in parliament but the passing of the law is held up due to the very issue of divorce.

¹³ Concerns have been raised over the prevalence of kidnappings and conversions but little has been done in practice to combat the phenomenon. In October 2011, a committee of the Pakistani Senate expressed concern over reports that Hindu girls in Sindh province are being abducted for forced conversion to Islam.

¹⁴ Amar Lal, President of the Hindu Council in Karachi indicated that as many as 15-20 girls from the Hindu community in Pakistan are abducted every month and converted forcibly to Islam, a 2011 report from the Asia Human Rights Commission puts the number of converted Hindus around 300 per year, while Minorities Concern Pakistan estimates that at least 700 Christian girls are kidnapped and forced to convert to Islam every year.

Underage Hindu girl forcibly married and converted, Karachi, Sindh province:

A Hindu family in Karachi reported that their 15 year old daughter was forcibly converted to Islam and the perpetrators used fake certificates to show that she was 18 years of age (the legal age for marriage) and willing to convert. The family filed an First Information Report (FIR) with the Baghdadi police station and produced a certificate from the National Database and Registration Authority that states her age is 15. The girl was not allowed to speak with her family and was in the presence of her captors at all times, particularly during police interviews.

Kidnapped Christian girl escapes after 10 years of abuse, Mariamabad, Sindh province:

A Christian girl was reported kidnapped in 2001 in Mariamabad, Sindh province at the age of 15 years old. At the time of the abduction and conversion, the girl's family lodged an FIR against the known kidnapper but police did not arrest him. The case went to the Lahore High Court where the victim issued a statement in favour of her kidnapper. Ten years after the abduction, in January 2012, the girl escaped and returned to her parent's home, reporting that she experienced severe psychological and physical abuse. The family has reportedly received continued threats from the kidnapper who went to their home with armed men threatening that he "would not be held responsible for any criminal acts against her" [the victim]. The family has registered another FIR against the kidnapper which continues to be under investigation.

Police submit false report in rape and murder case of a 15-year old Christian girl, Faisalabad, Punjab province

GHRD's partners investigated a case of a Christian girl from Faisalabad who was abducted by 4 Muslim youths and taken to a neighbouring village where she was gang raped and then brutally killed by gunshot. This event came after repeated threats to the girl and her family that they would be 'taught a lesson' for refusing to convert to Islam. The main perpetrator was arrested and kept in custody. However, he was released one week later and found innocent at the District and session court due to a false report submitted by the police. Witnesses in the locality stated that the perpetrator and his friends openly made statements in public that they bribed the police to provide this fake report.

Following the incident, the victim's family continued to receive death threats and pressure to leave their village from members of the perpetrators' family, who have openly stated that the family must "leave the village or they will all be killed one day" – which led them to drop their court case. They continue to live in the same locality, without justice for their daughter.

Threats against Human Rights Defenders

Those willing to speak up for social and legislative reform in Pakistan, particularly reform of the controversial blasphemy laws, continue to be targeted by societal actors, religious extremists and intelligence officials alike. In 2012, human rights defenders, aid, social and health workers were all in danger of death threats, false accusations and imprisonment, beatings, torture and killings.¹⁵ Attempts to bring perpetrators to justice in such cases are mostly futile and members of the judiciary and police are intimidated, threatened and bribed during the course of a case—inevitably influencing the outcome.

In 2012 alone, kidnappings, killings and assassination attempts on human rights defenders and aid workers shocked the world. In October, Taliban militants shot Malala Yousafzai, a 14 year old female activist who campaigned for girls' education in the Swat Valley, in an attempt on her life. In July, Farida Afridi, Executive Director of women's rights organisation Sawera in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province was shot to death after receiving threats for her women's rights work and accusations that she was following a "western agenda". In April, a British citizen working for the Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) was kidnapped and killed, acting as a catalyst for the Red Cross to review and reduce its activities in the country. High-level threats against prominent human rights activist Asma Jahangir¹⁶ and the failure of the Pakistani government to investigate the high level plot to kill her also gave rise to international condemnation from human rights organisations and individuals alike.¹⁷



¹⁵ Pakistan was ranked 151st out of 179 countries in the 2011-2012 annual press freedom rankings by Reporters Without Borders. <http://en.rsf.org/report-pakistan,74.html>

¹⁶ Former United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion and Belief and former President of the Supreme Court Bar Association of Pakistan.

¹⁷ GHRD's petition: Protect Pakistan's leading human rights activist Asma Jahangir, gained over 1100 signatures, calling for Pakistani authorities to investigate the plots against her.

Health workers continue to be targeted by militants for adhering to so-called 'western agendas'. Late in December 2012 five female polio vaccinators were shot dead in co-ordinated attacks across two cities in Pakistan (Karachi and Peshawar), and seven charity workers, five of whom were women, were also killed in North west Pakistan, with suspicions that the killings were linked to the earlier attacks targeting polio campaigns in Pakistan.

Despite the difficulties posed by the presence of pervasive extremist ideologies in Pakistan, the lack of investigation and prosecution in relation to such cases of intimidation, attacks and assassinations of human rights defenders proves a lack of willingness on the part of government authorities to fully protect those who stand up for equal rights and freedoms.

Stalled investigations into murders of Salman Taseer (former Governor of Punjab Province) and Shabbaz Bhatti (former Minister for Minority Affairs):

In 2012, the Cold blooded killings of Salman Taseer (former Governor of Punjab Province) and Shabbaz Bhatti (former Minister for Minority Affairs) remained inadequately investigated and the perpetrators of these crimes remain unaccountable.

Salman Taseer was assassinated by his bodyguard, Mumtaz Qadri in 2011, who confessed to doing so because of the Governor's stance on blasphemy reform. Qadri was publicly celebrated as a hero by fundamentalists. Qadri was sentenced to death on October 1st 2011 by the Special Court of Anti-terrorism in Rawalpindi, however, the sentence was stayed in the Islamabad High Court on October 11, 2011. The Anti Terrorist Court Judge Justice Pervez Ali Shah who gave out Qadri's sentence has reportedly fled to Saudi Arabia in October 2011 with his family due to death threats. Taseer's son has since been abducted and the Taseer family receives threats to withdraw their case.

Following soon after the assassination of Taseer, Shabbaz Bhatti was assassinated by members of Tehrik-i-Taliban outside his family home in Islamabad, who surrounded and shot him in his vehicle. The Christian Minister had previously received numerous death threats for his efforts to reform the blasphemy law. In spite of these repeated threats, Mr. Bhatti's request for his own choice of trusted bodyguards and for the use of a bulletproof official car was refused by the Pakistani authorities. In June 2011, an anti-terrorism court ordered the release of a suspect held in connection with the murder of Bhatti, after the police failed to produce any evidence against him. All further investigations have proved ineffective.



GHRD Highlights 2012

Advocacy tour “Extremism in South Asia”

December, London and The Hague

In December, GHRD organised a lobby tour with Pakistani and Bangladeshi speakers to address the current situation in both countries and concerns for minorities in the upcoming elections in 2013. The week’s events involved meetings with policy makers, parliamentarians and civil society organisations, beginning in London with a seminar at the House of Lords and ending with an event and debate in The Hague.

Workshop and capacity building conference “Raising voices for minority rights”

November, Kathmandu

Approximately 25 South Asian human rights activists came together for a one week capacity building conference organised by GHRD in Kathmandu to participate in workshops on religious minorities and provide training on human rights fact finding and investigation, intercultural communication, and safety for human rights defenders.

Side event, Universal Periodic Review: “Ending bonded labour in Pakistan - From legal rights to real change” 29 October, Geneva

GHRD, in partnership with Trócaire (Caritas Ireland) and Anti-Slavery International, hosted a panel discussion on the subject of Bonded Labour in Pakistan at the United Nations Palais the day prior to the Universal Periodic Review of Pakistan at the Human Rights Council. GHRD also made a joint submission to the Universal Periodic Review of Pakistan, held at the United Nations Human Rights Council on 30 October.

Minorities in Pakistan mark Pakistani National Minorities Day a ‘black day’

11 August, Lahore

Government institutions and dignitaries celebrated National Minorities Day on 11 August, but GHRD’s local partners and other members of minority communities marked the day as a ‘black day’ arguing that there is no reason for celebration based on the actual situation of minorities in Pakistan.

Fact Finding Training, April, Faisalabad

In April, 16 minority rights observers, volunteers, community leaders and activists from various regions in Pakistan completed a two day training on human rights fact finding and documentation, organised by GHRD in Faisalabad.

Protest and Peace Concert, 10 March, London

Human rights activists, religious leaders and individuals joined in protest in London against minority discrimination in Pakistan and to commemorate the death of Shabbaz Bhatti and other Pakistani activists. A petition was presented by a collective of organisations, including GHRD, to the British Prime Minister’s Office at 10 Downing street.

Condemning gender based violence and promoting women rights, International Women’s Day, 8 March, Faisalabad

Human Rights Focus Pakistan brought minority women, politicians, human rights activists, students, lawyers, workers and business owners together at an awareness event entitled “Condemning gender based violence and promoting women rights”. Activities included theatre performances, discussion forums and a rally.

Promoting a discrimination and violence free society in Pakistan: Press conference and public demonstration, 2 March, Faisalabad

Over 150 minority individuals joined together in Faisalabad on March 2nd, the anniversary of Shabbaz Bhatti’s death, in a rally to protest discrimination against minorities and call for government commitment to change. Minority leaders from the Hindu, Christian, Bahai and Sikh communities also united in a press conference to condemn discrimination of religious minorities.



Recommendations

The following points are based on recommendations made in a joint submission by GHRD and Human Rights Focus Pakistan (HRFP) to the United Nations Human Rights Council 14th session of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review (22 October - 5 November 2012), on the situation of minorities in Pakistan.

These recommendations are directed to the Government of Pakistan and to international authorities, policy makers and governments engaging in dialogue with Pakistan.

1. Combat corruption and impunity for human rights crimes in the police force by:
 - a) Increasing efforts to fully and impartially investigate and prosecute human rights crimes committed against minorities;
 - b) Creating an independent, specially trained taskforce to investigate incidences of violence against minorities and police impunity in these cases;
 - c) Provide training to all police authorities on human rights sensitivity; and,
 - d) Fully and impartially prosecute cases of police negligence and impunity.
2. Instigate public information campaigns on religious tolerance and the promotion of interfaith harmony.
3. Repeal, or at the very least review the blasphemy laws. In particular, amend the laws related to sentencing by reducing the maximum penalties of death and life imprisonment, include a requirement of intent in the law, and provide clearer terminology in relation to standards of proof. Ensure that cases of blasphemy are properly and impartially investigated and release those who have been imprisoned without adequate investigation or trial.
4. Initiate a formal inquiry into the issue of kidnapping and forced conversion of minorities, including the creation of a specially trained taskforce to investigate the number and prevalence of kidnapping and forced conversions of minority women and the factors that lead to such conversions.
5. Encourage the speedy process of legislation to regulate marriage and divorce of people from minority religions.
6. Conduct formal investigations into cases of threats, attacks and assassinations against human rights defenders and bring those responsible to justice.
7. Encourage the Government of Pakistan to remove all discriminatory references from the current educational curriculum and to foster interfaith harmony within schools in Pakistan.

At: Faisala Human Rights

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