

THE VOICELESS VICTIMS OF PAKISTAN'S BLASPHEMY LAWS

29 Pakistani Christians currently in prison
and a guide to effective advocacy on their behalf

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THE VOICELESS VICTIMS OF PAKISTAN'S BLASPHEMY LAWS:

29 PAKISTANI CHRISTIANS CURRENTLY IN PRISON
AND A GUIDE TO EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY ON THEIR BEHALF



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Executive Summary

According to the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom's (USCIRF) 2018 Fact-sheet on Blasphemy, roughly one-third of the world's nations maintain a law, or a set of laws, punishing the crime of blasphemy. In Pakistan—one of three countries where blasphemy is punishable by death—these laws are widely abused to settle personal scores and incite religious hatred. Due to widespread religious intolerance and bias, members of Pakistan's religious minority communities are disproportionately accused and punished under the country's blasphemy laws.

In 2018, Asia Bibi, a Christian woman, was acquitted of the blasphemy charges that had kept her on death row for nearly a decade. The lessons learned from her case, including the international advocacy critical to her acquittal, help to create a template for advocating on behalf of other religious minorities facing similar charges in Pakistan.

In this report, International Christian Concern (ICC) reviews Pakistan's blasphemy laws and the experience of religious minorities under these laws. ICC goes on to analyze the Asia Bibi case and draws out important lessons that should be applied to similar, ongoing cases.

This report provides the profiles of 25 current cases in which Pakistani Christians sit charged with or convicted of committing blasphemy. These 25 cases need appropriate international advocacy to come to a successful conclusion. Towards this end, this report provides practical recommendations for the international community which ICC has drawn from the Asia Bibi case and from years of experience working with Christian victims of blasphemy in Pakistan.

Pakistan's Blasphemy Laws

Sections 295, 295-A, 295-B, and 295-C of Pakistan's Penal Code collectively make up Pakistan's blasphemy laws. Under these sections, Pakistani authorities are empowered to punish individuals deemed guilty of offending another's religious sentiments.

- Section 295: Injuring or defiling places of worship, with intent to insult the religion of any class. Punishable by up to two years' imprisonment, or fine, or both
- Section 295-A: Deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs. Punishable by up to 10 years' imprisonment, or fine, or both
- Section 295-B: Defiling, etc., of the Quran. Punishable by imprisonment for life
- Section 295-C: Use of derogatory remarks—spoken, written, direct or indirect, etc.—that defile the name of the Holy Prophet Muhammad. Mandatory death sentence and fine

As can be seen, Pakistan's blasphemy laws vary in regard to punishment, with 295-C carrying the deadliest consequences for those found guilty. What can also be seen is how Islam is elevated above other religions in sections 295-B and 295-C.

According to USCIRF's 2019 Annual Report, "Accusers are not required to present proper evidence that blasphemy occurred, which leads to abuse, including false accusations." In many cases, false accusations are motivated by personal score-settling or religious hatred.

According to the National Commission for Justice and Peace (NCJP), a human rights advocacy group formed by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Pakistan, "The worst effect of the blasphemy laws [are] that they instill a sense of insecurity among non-Muslims in their daily life. While their interactions with neighbors, colleagues, and fellow passengers are inevitable, a looming ignorance and fanaticism make religion a convenient tool of religious persecution."

"As far as [the] impact of the laws, the minorities suffer the most due to the environment created by the existence of the blasphemy laws," NCJP reported in its 2018 Human Rights Monitor. *"In [the] case of a non-Muslim accused, the trial takes several years of pleading, and the whole community is targeted. In several incidents, places of worship, properties were burnt, and household goods looted."*

In addition to the threat of false accusations and severe judicial punishments, communal violence and extrajudicial murders have become a regular feature in the aftermath of non-Muslims being accused of blasphemy. According to USCIRF, "Many individuals accused of blasphemy never made it to the courtroom as vigilante violence has caused the murder of 62 people since 1990, with very few prosecutions for mob violence and lynching."

After Pakistan added Sections 295-B and 295-C to the country's blasphemy laws in 1987, the number of blasphemy accusations in Pakistan skyrocketed. Between 1987 and 2017, 1,534 individuals in Pakistan were accused of blasphemy.

The disproportionate nature of blasphemy accusations in Pakistan is easily seen when comparing the Pakistan's population data against the breakdown of blasphemy accusations by religious identity.

According to the most recent data available, religious minorities only make up 3.6% of Pakistan's total population. Christians, who make up Pakistan's largest religious minority, only make up 1.6% of the total population. Out of the total 1,534 blasphemy accusations, 829 accusations (54%), were made against religious minorities.

238 (15.5%) were made against Christians specifically.

Comparing these figures further strengthen the claim that Pakistan's blasphemy laws are discriminatory and disproportionately affect the country's Christian minority.

The Asia Bibi Case Study

On May 5, 2019, Asia Bibi, a Christian woman who spent eight years on death row for allegedly committing blasphemy, was finally allowed to flee Pakistan and seek asylum in Canada. Her safe departure, which came more than six months after Pakistan's Supreme Court acquitted Bibi, brought to a close nearly ten years of international advocacy for Bibi's release and against the abuse of Pakistan's blasphemy laws.

Over that near-decade of advocacy, Bibi's name became synonymous with the abuse of blasphemy laws in Pakistan. In many ways, her case became an international representative of the issue of blasphemy laws as a whole and can now be viewed as a case study on the issue.

Bibi's conviction was based on flimsy evidence and was likely motivated by a petty dispute that took place in June of 2009. This dispute took place between Bibi and some Muslim coworkers with whom she was harvesting berries in Sheikhpura, Pakistan. Bibi's Muslim coworkers became angry after Bibi, a Christian whom they considered unclean, drank water from the same bowl as the Muslims.

An argument ensued, and the Muslim coworkers reported to Qari Saleem, a local imam, that Bibi had blasphemed against the Prophet Muhammad. Days later, Saleem formally accused Bibi of committing blasphemy and Bibi was arrested by local police.

In November 2010, Bibi was convicted of committing blasphemy by the Sessions Court of Sheikhpura and was sentenced to death by hanging. In addition to the death sentence, Bibi was fined \$1,100. Bibi was the first woman in Pakistan's history to be sentenced to death on blasphemy charges.

Over the next four years, Bibi's appeal to the High Court appeal was delayed and rescheduled seven times. When the appeal was finally held in October 2014 by the Lahore High Court, the two-member bench confirmed Bibi's death sentence. Less than a year later, in July 2015, the Supreme Court of Pakistan accepted Bibi's petition for review and suspended her death sentence pending their final verdict.

After another three years of hearings, the Supreme Court of Pakistan announced its decision to acquit Bibi of the blasphemy charges on October 31, 2018. The court explained that there was ultimately not sufficient evidence to convict Bibi on the blasphemy charges brought against her.

Following the announcement of the acquittal, thousands of religious hardliners in Pakistan took to the streets in protest. These protesters demanded the Supreme Court review its decision and not allow Bibi to leave Pakistan until the review took place. The government of Pakistan agreed. On January 29, 2019, Pakistan's Supreme Court confirmed its decision to acquit Bibi. More than four months later, Bibi and her family were finally allowed to flee Pakistan.

Overwhelming international support for Bibi was critical during this fitful legal process. This support included multiple letters from members of the United States Congress, many statements of support by world leaders—including Pope Benedict—and economic pressure from the European Union, which made Pakistan's Preferential Trade Status contingent on the release of Bibi. This overwhelming and specific international support eventually led to Bibi's acquittal and release.

While Bibi's acquittal and release is something that should be celebrated, it is important to remember that she is not the only individual, or even Christian, to suffer under Pakistan's blasphemy laws. In fact, since Sections 295-B and 295-C were added to Pakistan's Penal Code in 1987, more than 1,500 individuals have been accused of committing blasphemy.

Importance of International Advocacy

The majority of Christians accused or convicted of blasphemy in Pakistan have not received the same international attention as Asia Bibi. In fact, the majority of these cases are unknown to the international community.

Because of this anonymity, these individuals have received little of the international advocacy that was critical in securing Asia Bibi's acquittal and release. Instead, these cases remain stalled at various levels of the Pakistani judicial system.

This point is brought into focus when comparing the cases of Asia Bibi and Imran Ghafur Masih, who was accused blasphemy only a few weeks after Asia Bibi in July 2009. His conviction and life sentence were handed down almost ten months before Asia Bibi was sentenced to death in January 2010.

Despite this proximity to the Asia Bibi case, Imran Masih's situation changed very little for more than ten years after his conviction. In fact, Imran Masih's appeal to the Lahore High Court was repeatedly delayed and very little change took place between September 18, 2015 and December 10, 2020. Finally, on December 10, 2020, over ten years after his conviction, Imran Masih was acquitted of the blasphemy charges he was convicted of in July 2009.

Without international advocacy, individual blasphemy cases like Imran Masih's move extremely slowly and often stall within the Pakistani judicial system. This is likely due to the religious bias faced by minorities accused of blasphemy and the pressure put on members of Pakistan's judicial system by fundamentalists and extremists.

Using the information presented in this report, ICC hopes to bring greater international attention and advocacy to other Christians accused of blasphemy. Without this attention and advocacy, the cases of other Christians will likely continue to meander and stall.

Public vs. Quiet Advocacy

Consistent and specific international advocacy is critical to securing justice for religious minorities falsely accused of blasphemy in Pakistan. However, not all forms of international advocacy are equally advisable.

Public advocacy, especially advocacy by governments and international bodies perceived as "Western" in Pakistan, may be counterproductive. Western public advocacy has the potential to incite backlash from religious fundamentalists and extremists in Pakistan. This is because religious fundamentalists and extremists equate Western public advocacy against Pakistan's blasphemy laws with a foreign assault on Islam. This instigates a reaction in which Islam, represented by the blasphemy laws and convictions made under those laws, must be defended against foreign influences. This defensive reaction is made regardless of the merits of the arguments against the blasphemy laws or the lack of merit in particular cases.

This can be seen in the case of Asia Bibi. The public international advocacy done on her behalf did move the case through Pakistan's judicial system. However, it also enflamed the passions of religious fundamentalists and extremists. This left the Pakistani authorities adjudicating Asia Bibi's case to choose between the ire of the inter-

national community if they didn't acquit or the rage of the domestic mob if they did acquit.

When the Supreme Court of Pakistan announced its decision to acquit Asia Bibi on October 31, 2018, it sparked three days of nationwide protests led by religious fundamentalists and extremists. These protests brought the country to a three-day standstill. Peace was not restored until the Pakistani government agreed to review the Supreme Court's decision to acquit Asia Bibi, forbid Asia Bibi from seeking asylum outside Pakistan, and release protestors that had been arrested. The government then had to wait six months before they were able to allow Asia Bibi to leave Pakistan and seek asylum in Canada.

Because public advocacy on behalf of the other Christians presented in this report has the potential to ignite similar protests, public advocacy should only be used as a last resort. While this public advocacy did eventually see Asia Bibi released, it also created a high-stakes security situation that likely delayed the adjudication of her case.

Instead, quiet and consistent advocacy, specifically made through diplomatic communications to Pakistani government leaders and members of Pakistan's judicial system, would be more advised. Through this quiet and consistent diplomacy, authorities in Pakistan—especially those involved in the adjudication of blasphemy cases—would be made aware of the international concern surrounding a particular blasphemy case without drawing the attention of religious fundamentalists or extremists.

Profiling Christian Blasphemy Victims

Starting in 2019, ICC began profiling the cases of Christians currently accused of blasphemy in Pakistan. The 29 Christians profiled by ICC are the defendants in 25 blasphemy cases represented at various levels of the judicial process in Pakistan. While it is unlikely these individuals and their cases represent all Christians affected by Pakistan's blasphemy laws, these are the 25 that ICC could confirm with a high degree of certainty.

To verify a case and compose a profile, ICC had to be able to collect the following information: the name of the individual charged with blasphemy, the First Information Report associated with the blasphemy charges, the section or sections of the blasphemy laws charged, the date of the arrest, the current status of the individual case, and a brief overview of the blasphemy accusation and the following criminal case. This information was collected through media sources, human rights activists, local NGOs, relatives of victims, and local lawyers representing cases.

Out of the 29 Christians, 21 were adult men, four were adult women, and four were minors. In addition to these demographics, ICC noted that two of the adult men suffer from known mental disabilities.

Out of the 25 cases, five were before a High Court in Pakistan seeking to appeal either a death sentence or a sentence to life imprisonment. Out of these five cases, ICC documented two sentences to life imprisonment and four death sentences. Twenty cases were before a Sessions Court, most waiting for the initial trial to take place. In one case, where Shehzad Masih was the defendant, ICC was able to confirm the blasphemy accusation but was unable to confirm the judicial level to which the criminal case had proceeded.

Using these profiles, provided at the end of this report, ICC hopes to raise awareness and generate appropriate international advocacy for these 29 Christians imprisoned on blasphemy charges. As previously stated, these Christians are less known on the international stage than was Asia Bibi. As can be seen in her case, consistent and specific international advocacy plays an important and sometimes decisive role in ensuring that the case is adjudicated justly and in a timely manner.

Action: Direct Outreach

ICC recommends quiet, consistent, and specific advocacy on behalf of each of the 29 individuals detailed in this report. The major impetus behind each of the cases detailed below comes from radical elements in society rather than from the judicial system, leading ICC to believe that quiet advocacy directly to the government of Pakistan is the most effective course of action. While it would be ideal if Pakistan's blasphemy laws were repealed altogether, publicly advocating for this action is likely to anger religious fundamentalists and worsen the condition of those still in prison.

Pressure from the international community is vital—it lets the Pakistani officials adjudicating the cases know that they are being watched and that they must allow the cases to pass through the judicial system. ICC can provide the names of relevant Pakistani officials to those interested in conducting this kind of direct advocacy.

Reaching out to individual officials can create significant pressure with far less risk of stirring up a strong negative response in the local population. Communications with Pakistani officials should focus on the swift and fair adjudication of these cases on their merits. Every case presented in this report has been carefully vetted, and the accusation in every instance is demonstrably false. A ruling in favor of one of these defendants could create positive judicial precedent and could, therefore, have a positive effect on the other cases.

If no response is received to this direct outreach, it may then become appropriate to threaten to initiate public advocacy. ICC can provide assistance in making this decision on a case-by-case basis. The intention here is to incentivize action from officials who will want to avoid a situation where the mob may become more involved. There are varying levels at which this public advocacy can be conducted, starting with a public statement and escalating all the way up to the type of international campaign such as seen in Asia Bibi's case.

Action: Policy Recommendations

First, the Obama-era policy requiring that American diplomats advocate for Pakistani prisoners of conscience in every meeting with Pakistani officials should be resurrected and applied to known blasphemy cases.

ICC is familiar with specific offices within the Department of State that do this on a regular basis, but the practice should be institutionalized across the entire Department for maximum effectiveness as consistent follow-up will help to raise the profile of these cases with Pakistani officials.

Second, the Department of State and the Treasury Department should consider how their sanctioning authorities could be brought to bear on the pattern of unjustified incarcerations regularly imposed on Pakistan's religious minority communities. International pressure in the form of personal sanctions on individuals involved in the abuse of Pakistan's blasphemy laws could have great effect.

Third, the United States and its allies should clearly communicate to Pakistan that it must swiftly and fairly adjudicate these cases, and others like them, as a condition for Pakistan to be removed from the CPC list and for other human rights sanctions to be lifted. While this message can and should be communicated in direct, bilateral discussions, relevant U.S. institutions such as the Department of State and USCIRF should communicate this publicly as well.

ZAFAR BHATTI

First Information Report Number: 526/12

Sections Charged: 295-C; 25-D of the Telegraph Act

Date Arrested: July 22, 2012

Case Status: Sentenced to Life Imprisonment; Awaiting Appeal

On July 11, 2012, Ahmed Khan, a local Islamic leader in New Town, Rawalpindi, filed a complaint with local police that an unregistered number sent him text messages insulting the Prophet Muhammad's mother. The leader then forced local police to open an investigation for blasphemy under Section 295-C of Pakistan's Penal Code, even though the complaint truly belonged under Section 295-A. A First Information Report was then filed against an unknown person.

Then, on July 22, police arrested Pastor Zafar Bhatti and charged him with sending the text messages from the unregistered number. According to Bhatti, police tortured him into confessing to the crime.

Multiple reports prove that Ghazala Khan, rather than Bhatti, owned the unregistered number. On November 11, 2012, Khan was arrested and also charged with blasphemy. However, at trial in April 2013, Justice Khalid Mehmood of the Lahore High Court refused to pass judgment in Khan's case and instead tried to convince the petitioner to forgive Khan. Khan refused but was released on bail, pending the court's final decision. In November 2016, Khan died from Hepatitis C.

On May 3, 2017, Bhatti was sentenced to life in prison under section 295-C of Pakistan's Penal Code by Additional District and Session Judge Mohammad Yar Gondal. According to reports, Bhatti was given life in prison even though Section 295-C carries a mandatory death sentence because there was no evidence presented against him.

On April 11, 2019, Bhatti's appeal was heard by the High Court after being delayed and rescheduled at least twice. On April 25, 2019, the judge presiding over Bhatti's appeal claimed there was no evidence against Bhatti, and he should be released. However, the judge granted an adjournment until June 19 to allow the police and prosecution to produce evidence.

The final decision on Bhatti's appeal was then delayed two more times on June 19, 2019 and September 12, 2019 by the High Court judge. On October 10, 2019, the High Court judge announced that he would not rule on Bhatti's case and transferred the appeal to another court. A new appeal date was set for March 25, 2020, but this was delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

On June 22, 2021, an additional sessions court judge in the Rawalpindi District upheld Bhatti's blasphemy conviction, confirming his life sentence. An appeal to the High Court was scheduled in September 2021.

Further Reading:

<https://www.churchinchains.ie/prisoner-profiles/zafar-bhatti/>

ASIF PERVAIZ

First Information Report Number: 678/13

Sections Charged: 295-A; 295-B; 295-C; 25-D of the Telegraph Act

Date Arrested: October 30, 2013

Case Status: Sentenced to Death; Awaiting Appeal

On October 2, 2013, a Muslim named Saeed Ahmeed Khokar accused his Christian coworker, Asif Pervaiz, of sending him blasphemous text messages from his mobile phone. Blasphemy charges under Sections 295-A, 295-B, and 295-C of Pakistan's Penal Code were then registered against Pervaiz at the Green Town Police Station in Lahore.

When Pervaiz became aware of the charges, he went into hiding. On October 9, after a week of searching for Pervaiz, police arrested several of Pervaiz's relatives, including two brothers-in-law and his mother, Naseem Akhtar. According to Akhtar, police told her that they would kill Pervaiz when they found him unless she helped them locate her son.

Akhtar led the police to the home of Waseem Anwar, Asif's brother. There, police beat Waseem until he confessed to knowing where Pervaiz was hidden. On October 10, 2013, Pervaiz was arrested by police in Sahiwal.

According to Pervaiz's family, Pervaiz and Khokar were coworkers at a garments factory named Shami Textile, located in the Youhanabad neighborhood of Lahore. At work, Khokar often pressured Pervaiz to convert to Islam, which Pervaiz refused to do. Prior to October 2, Pervaiz reportedly lost his mobile phone's SIM card and did not request the company to deactivate it. According to Pervaiz's family, Khokar used the lost SIM card to send the blasphemous text messages to register a false case against Pervaiz.

On September 8, 2020, Pervaiz was sentenced to death by a trial court in Lahore. According to Pervaiz's attorney, Saif-ul-Malook, the death sentence was applied by the court despite there being "no evidence" to support the conviction. Pervaiz's legal team plans to appeal the death sentence to the Lahore High Court.

In October 2020, Pervaiz was moved from Lahore District Jail to Faisalabad Jail, over 70 miles away from his family and home.

Further Reading:

<http://www.claasfamily.com/news/Fact%20Finding%20Report%20of%20Asif%20Pervaiz%20blasphemy%20case.pdf/>

<https://www.persecution.org/2020/09/08/pakistani-christian-sentenced-death-allegedly-sending-blasphemous-text-messages-2013/>

<https://www.churchinchains.ie/prisoner-profiles/asif-pervaiz/>

ADNAN PRINCE

First Information Report Number: 675/13

Sections Charged: 295-A; 295-B; 295-C

Date Arrested: November 6, 2013

Case Status: Released on Bail; Awaiting Trial

On October 7, 2013, Adnan Prince was filling in for his brother at the New Diamond Glass Shop in the Johar Town neighborhood of Lahore. While at work, Prince found a book entitled *I Asked The Bible Why The Qur'ans Were Set On Fire*, a highly controversial book written by Maulana Ameer Hamza, leader of the Jamaat-ud-Dawa group.

Prince began reading the book and made several notes inside of it. Abdi Mehmood, a Muslim coworker, noticed Prince reading the book and took offense. The next day, Mehmood went to the local police station and accused Prince of marking several pages with abusive words against the Prophet of Islam. Police registered a blasphemy case against Prince under Sections 295-A, 295-B, and 295-C of Pakistan's Penal Code.

When Prince was made aware of the blasphemy charges, he went into hiding. When police could not locate Prince, they arrested several members of Prince's family, including his brother, mother, aunt, and uncle. They were told that they would not be released until Prince had been located and arrested.

On November 6, 2013, Prince returned home after hearing his family had been arrested and surrendered to police. According to Prince, police told him to keep quiet about the fact that he had been arrested on blasphemy charges for fear of attacks from other prisoners. However, Prince reports that the police tortured him that night in an attempt to extract a confession.

After three days, Prince was transferred to Lahore District Jail and confined to a small cell. He was reportedly kept away from other prisoners for his own protection.

On February 1, 2017, Prince was granted bail of 300,000 PKR (approximately \$3,000.00 USD) by the Supreme Court in Lahore after bail applications had been rejected by both the Sessions Court and High Court. The three-member bench, headed by Justice Dost Muhammad Khan, ordered Prince's release after more than three years in prison. However, to date, a final decision has not been made in Prince's case, and he remains accused of committing blasphemy.

Further Reading:

<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2017/02/pakistani-christian-accused-of-blasphemy-out-on-bail-after-three-years-in-prison/>

<https://www.christiansinpakistan.com/supreme-court-grants-bail-to-blasphemy-accused-christian/>

QAISAR AYUB & AMOON AYUB

First Information Report Number: 105/11

Sections Charged: 295-A; 295-B; 295-C

Arrest Date: November 10, 2014; November 17, 2014

Case Status: Sentenced to Death; Awaiting Appeal

In 2011, Qaisar Ayub and Amoon Ayub were accused of posting blasphemous articles and pictures of Prophet Muhammed on a website that was copyrighted in Qaisar's name. According to Qaisar and Amoon, they were falsely accused of blasphemy because of a quarrel between Qaisar and his Muslims friends that took place in 2010 at the Raja Centre in Lahore.

During that quarrel, a comment was made about the sister of another friend, who then blamed Qaisar for the insult. According to Qaisar and Amoon, this friend told Qaisar that this was a very serious issue in Pakistan. Shortly after that warning, Qaisar began to receive death threats and went into hiding.

Fearing for their lives, Qaisar and Amoon fled Pakistan. First, they went to Singapore, then to Thailand. However, the brothers returned to Pakistan in 2012. At this point, Qaisar was told a blasphemy case had been opened against him, and he could be arrested at any time.

On November 10, 2014, Qaisar was arrested while on his way to work at the Kids Campus DHA. Qaisar was charged with committing blasphemy under Section 295-C of Pakistan's Penal Code. A week later, Amoon was arrested by Immigration Police at Lahore Airport as he was trying to flee the country. Amoon was also charged with committing blasphemy under Section 295-C. Both brothers were kept in District Jail Jhelum after their arrests.

According to Qaisar, he has closed down the website where the blasphemous articles and pictures appeared in 2009. Qaisar reported that one of his Muslim friends, Shahryar Gill, managed to restore the website while keeping the registration in his name.

On December 13, 2018, the brothers were sentenced to death by Judge Javed Iqbal Bosal of the Talagang District Jhelum. Their case has reportedly been appealed to the Lahore High Court but, to date, has yet to be heard.

Further Reading:

<http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Two-Christian-brothers-sentenced-to-death-for-blasphemy-in-Punjab-45748.html/>

<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2018/12/two-pakistani-christian-brothers-sentenced-to-death-for-blasphemy/>

<https://www.claas.org.uk/news/pakistani-christian-brothers-charged-with-blasphemy-sentenced-to-death/>

HUMAYUN FAISAL

First Information Report Number: 424/15

Sections Charged: 295-B

Date Arrested: May 24, 2015

Case Status: Awaiting Trial

On May 24, 2015, Humayun Faisal was accused of blasphemy after he was allegedly witnessed burning newspapers containing Quranic verses. The incident took place in the Sanda-Dhoop Sari area of Lahore, a Christian majority neighborhood.

According to local Christians, Faisal is both mentally disabled and a drug addict. Before the blasphemy allegation, Faisal had spent six months in an insane asylum.

On May 24, Faisal was seen wandering the streets of Sanda-Dhoop Sari when someone allegedly saw him burning pages of the newspaper. According to this witness, some of the pages being burned carried Quranic verses.

Faisal was immediately confronted, beaten, and handed over to police by a mob of enraged Muslims. Police attempted to disregard the blasphemy accusation against Faisal. However, local religious leaders claimed they would burn Faisal alive if he was not arrested and charged with blasphemy. As a result, Faisal was charged with committing blasphemy under Section 295-B of Pakistan's Penal Code.

A mob then attacked the Christian neighborhood of Sanda-Dhoop Sari, ransacking Christian homes and desecrating a local church. Approximately 20 to 25 Christian homes were damaged as a result of the violence, which was eventually disbursed by police.

To date, Faisal remains in judicial custody as he awaits trial.

Further Reading:

<https://www.christiansinpakistan.com/police-clash-with-protestors-after-humayun-masih-charged-with-295c/>

<http://touchstonemag.com/merecomments/2015/05/pray-humayun-masih/>

<https://www.persecution.org/2015/06/01/christian-neighborhood-ransacked-following-latest-blasphemy-accusation-in-pakistan/>

YAQOOB BASHIR MASIH

First Information Report Number: 41/15

Sections Charged: 295-B; 295-C

Date Arrested: June 4, 2015

Case Status: Sentenced to Life Imprisonment; Awaiting Appeal

On June 4, 2015, Yaqoob Bashir Masih was accused of desecrating a Quran in the Lukoo Shade Mehmoodabad neighborhood of Mirpurkhas. A mob, led by Talib Hussain, a local Muslim cleric, attacked Masih's home and beat him. Masih's neighbor, Mushtaq Masih, reported that the mob doused Masih with kerosene oil and threatened to set him on fire if he did not confess to desecrating the Quran.

After Masih told the mob that he had burned the Quran and buried it, local police intervened, arrested Masih, and took him to the Mehmoodabad Police Station. There Masih was charged with blasphemy under Sections 295-B and 295-C of Pakistan's Penal Code.

Prior to this incident, Masih was declared mentally disabled and received treatment from a mental health facility in Hyderabad. Hussain, the Muslim cleric that accused Masih of blasphemy, was reportedly helping Masih overcome his mental disability and told him that his mental condition would improve if he recited the Quran.

On the morning of June 4, Hussain reportedly gave a copy of the Quran to Masih, who said his sisters would read it to him. Later that day, students from a nearby madrassah claim they saw Masih burning the Quran and reported what they saw to Hussain.

Both Masih's family and neighbors report that Masih has significant mental disabilities. According to Kasuar Bibi, Bashir's mother, *"My son is innocent. He does not know the sensitivity of religious feelings or sacredness of the holy books. He did not burn the pages of the Islamic literature intentionally. He is mentally unstable and therefore should be forgiven."*

After three years in prison and approximately 96 hearing, Masih was sentenced to life in prison by the Sessions and District Court of Mirpurkhas. He is currently being held in the Central Jail in Hyderabad, where he is seeking to appeal his case to the Hyderabad High Court.

Further Reading:

<https://www.persecution.org/2015/06/05/mentally-disabled-christian-accused-of-committing-blasphemy-in-pakistan/>

<https://www.persecution.org/2018/10/24/mentally-disabled-pakistani-christian-sentenced-life-in-prison/>

<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2015/06/second-mentally-ill-pakistani-in-2-weeks-charged-with-desecrating-koran/>

<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2018/10/pakistani-christian-gets-life-for-blasphemy-despite-learning-difficulties/>

NADEEM JAMES

First Information Report Number: 301/16

Sections Charged: 295-A; 295-C

Date Arrested: July 12, 2016

Case Status: Sentence to Death; Awaiting Appeal

On July 10, 2016, Nadeem James, a Christian from Yaqoobabad in the Gujrat District of Pakistan's Punjab Province, was accused of forwarding an allegedly blasphemous poem to a Muslim friend, Yasir Bashir. According to James' family, police then raided their home, arrested two female family members, and used their arrests to force James to surrender to police.

According to a local police official, the blasphemy case was registered against James after significant pressure from local Islamist leaders, led by Hafiz Muhammad Tariq, threatened to stage protests if police delayed the filing of the case.

On July 12, 2016, two days after police arrested James' sisters-in-law, James surrendered to police and was charged with committing blasphemy under Sections 295-A and 295-C of Pakistan's Penal Code. Soon after his arrest, James' sisters-in-law were released from police custody.

According to the initial investigation by police, a blasphemous WhatsApp text was sent to Bashir's mobile phone on July 4 as part of a religious argument that had been ongoing between the James and Bashir. After several days of attempting to negotiate a settlement, Bashir reported the matter to the police.

According to James' family, James and Bashir had been friends for more than 15 years prior to the incident.

On September 14, 2017, James was sentenced to death by the Sessions Court of Gujarat. Following this decision, James' Lawyer Raiz Anjum claimed that his client intended to appeal the verdict to the High Court. To date, James' High Court appeal has yet to be heard.

Further Reading:

<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2016/07/pakistan-christian-family-flees-after-whatsapp-blasphemy-accusation/>

<https://morningstarnews.org/2016/07/christian-in-pakistan-charged-with-blasphemy-after-argument-with-muslim-friend/>

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/09/pakistan-sentences-christian-man-death-blasphemy-170916091856674.html>

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/sep/16/pakistan-man-sentenced-to-death-for-ridiculing-prophet-muhammad-on-whatsapp>

NABEEL MASIH

First Information Report Number: 487/16

Sections Charged: 295; 295-A

Date Arrested: September 18, 2016

Case Status: Awaiting Trial

On September 18, 2016, Nabeel Masih, age 16, was accused of committing blasphemy by Akhtar Ali over a Facebook post that “defamed and disrespected” the Kaaba in Mecca. According to Ali, he and some other friends were looking at Facebook profiles when they discovered a picture on Masih’s profile timeline that depicted the Kaaba with a pig on top.

Ali filed a blasphemy accusation against Masih at the Phoolnagar Police Station, and police vans were deployed to Masih’s home in Dina Nath village, located in the Kasur district of Punjab. There, police arrested Masih and formally charged him with committing blasphemy under Sections 295 and 295-A of Pakistan’s Penal Code.

Police claim that they removed the allegedly blasphemous image from Facebook to prevent further violence from being incited. This removal has made it difficult to determine if Masih is innocent or not. It is still unknown whether Masih posted the photo himself or was just tagged in the photo.

In February 2017, Masih was refused bail by a local magistrate despite his lawyers’ instance that, as a child with no prior convictions, he should be released. This decision was appealed to the District and Session Court, where Judge Naveeb Iqbal also refused to hear the request for bail on May 17, 2017.

According to Aneeqa Maria Anthony, one of Masih’s lawyers, she and her legal team have faced intimidation from the complainant’s supporters, telling World Watch Monitor that an opposing lawyer warned her to “watch herself and stay away.” 80 people attended the hearing on bail and were threatening to the Masih family.

In 2018, Masih became the youngest blasphemy convict in Pakistan when the court sentenced hi to 10 years in prison. This conviction was appealed to the Lahore High Court. On March 1, 2021, Masih was granted bail by the Lahore High Court after being in prison since 2016.

Further Reading:

<https://www.gospelherald.com/articles/70525/20170518/16-year-old-pakistani-christian-boy-accused-blasphemy-facebook-post.htm>

<https://www.gospelherald.com/articles/66772/20160925/pakistan-christian-boy-could-be-put-to-death-for-blasphemous-facebook-post.htm>

<https://www.premier.org.uk/News/World/Christian-boy-refused-bail-over-Mecca-blasphemy-claim>

<https://hrwf.eu/forb-prisoner-campaign/nabeel-masih/>

<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2017/05/pakistan-christian-boy-16-accused-facebook-blasphemy-refused-bail/>

<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2016/09/pakistan-christian-boy-16-arrested-for-kaaba-blasphemy/>

<https://apnews.com/article/mecca-media-pakistan-social-media-lahore-f0ffa535801f31349eb74a0bdd0078ad>

ASHFAQ MASIH

First Information Report Number: 797/17

Sections Charged: N/A

Date Arrested: June 15, 2017

Case Status: Awaiting Trial

On June 15, 2017, Ashfaq Masih, a Christian bicycle mechanic from the Bagarhian neighborhood of Lahore, was accused of committing blasphemy after he was involved in a dispute over payment for services with Muhammad Ishfaq, a customer. According to reports, the argument between Masih and Ishfaq began when Ishfaq asked Masih to lower his demand of 35-40 PKR for his repair services.

The disagreement escalated, and a crowd, including Muhammad Ashfaq, gathered. In the midst of the argument, Masih reportedly “disrespected” Islam’s Prophet, Muhammad, when he told Ishfaq that Christians believe Jesus was the final prophet. This was reported to the police at the Green Town police station.

Police officers soon arrived on the scene of the argument, arrested Masih, and brought him to the Green Town police station. The Station House Officer of Green Town police station confirmed with local media that a blasphemy case had been registered against Maish under Section 295-C of the Pakistan Penal Code.

Since being accused, Masih has remained in police custody awaiting trial. Court hearings have been repeatedly cancelled including a hearing on July 19, 2021, in which several witnesses failed to attend the hearing. Since then, several more hearings have been postponed because the judge or witnesses failed to attend.

Further Reading:

<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2017/06/pakistani-christian-accused-blasphemy-saying-believes-jesus-final-prophet/>

<https://vom.com.au/pakistan-christian-accused-blasphemy/>

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1341120/>

<https://www.churchinchains.ie/prisoner-profiles/ashfaq-masih/>

SHEHZAD MASIH

First Information Report Number: 273/17

Sections Charged: N/A

Date Arrested: July 13, 2017

Case Status: N/A

On July 13, 2017, Shahzad Masih, a 16-year-old hospital sanitation worker, was accused of insulting the Prophet Muhammad by Ishtiaq Ahmed Jalali, a Muslim coworker, and Nadeem Ahmed, a local shop owner, in the city of Dinga, located in Pakistan's Punjab province. After being detained by a number of religious clerics, Masih was arrested by police for allegedly committing blasphemy.

According to Masih's father, Shafaqat Masih, the accusation originates from a religious discussion that took place between his son, a Christian, and Jalali, a Muslim and member of the conservative Tehreek-e-Tahfuz-e-Islam Pakistan group. According to Shafaqat, his son explained to Jalali that Christians follow Jesus and explained what Christians believe. Jalali became offended at some point during this conversation, but a doctor intervened and calmed the situation.

Nadeem Ahmed, a mobile phone repair shop owner whose shop is next to the Shameem Raiz Polyclinic Hospital, claims that Jalali told him about what Masih had said, so he called Masih to his shop ask about what he'd said. Ahmed then claims that Masih repeated "abusive words" against the Prophet Muhammad and fled. For this, Ahmed, who is also a member of the Tehreek-e-Tahfuz-e-Islam Pakistan group, filed a blasphemy complaint with local police.

Masih was again called back to Ahmed's shop, where he went accompanied by his father and his uncle Razaqat. There the group was confronted by a large gathering of religious clerics. According to Shafaqat, they were taken to a nearby madrassah to settle the matter. At the madrassah, the religious clerics argued that the only punishment for blasphemy was death.

Police then intervened, arrested Masih, and took him to the local police station. Station House Officer Shahbaz Hinjra, reported to local media that Masih had been taken into custody and that an investigation into the blasphemy accusation was underway. To date, it is unclear if Masih was formally charged with blasphemy or has been released by police.

Further Reading:

<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2017/07/pakistani-christian-boy-16-charged-blasphemy-discussing-faith/>

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/1458791/gujrat-police-arrest-christian-man-blasphemy-charges/>

ASIF STEPHEN

First Information Report Number: 298/17

Sections Charged: 295-B

Date Arrested: August 12, 2017

Case Status: Released on Bail; Awaiting Trial

On August 12, 2017, Asif Stephen, a 16-year-old Christian from Jamkay Cheema village, was accused of burning pages of the Quran by Muhammad Nawaz, also known as Majhoo. According to his family, Stephen, who is completely illiterate and also slightly mentally disabled, has been falsely accused by Majhoo because he is a business rival.

The incident began on August 12, when Majhoo confronted Stephen in the local market. According to reports, Majhoo grabbed Stephen and claimed he had broken into the money collection box at the Shrine of Sundhay Shah, located in Jamkay. As a mob gathered, Majhoo claimed that Stephen had burned pages of the Quran. At this, the mob began to beat Stephen.

While being beaten, Stephen was forced into giving a false confession. Police were called to the scene and arrested Stephen. Stephen was then taken to the Ali Pur Chattha police station, where he was charged with committing blasphemy under Section 295-B of Pakistan's Penal Code.

The Quran that Stephen is accused of burning was discovered outside the Shrine of Sundhay Shah on July 18 or 19—almost a month before he was accused and arrested. Waheed Masih, Stephen's uncle, claims he was told that the burned Quran was given to Majhoo for burial but that Majhoo kept the damaged Quran to accuse Stephen falsely.

According to local reports, both Majhoo and Stephen collected recyclables that they resold from the area around the Shrine of Sundhay Shah. A rivalry between the two was also reported, which Stephen's family believes is the motive for Majhoo's accusation.

Sub-Inspector Pervez Iqbal, the investigating officer in the case, told the media that two witnesses and the complainant, Majhoo, testified that Stephen had committed blasphemy. However, the officer went on to say that since Stephen had confessed to the crime, there was no need to record the statements of other witnesses. In January 2020, Stephen was released from prison on bail. However, the final adjudication of the charges against Stephen has yet to take place.

Further Reading:

<http://claasfamily.com/?p=2472>

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/christian-teenager-pakistan-quran-burn-beaten-almost-death-blasphemy-asif-stephen-a7904961.html>

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/1486558/gujranwala-mob-thrashes-christian-teenager-accusing-burning-holy-quran/>

<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2017/08/pakistan-illiterate-christian-boy-16-forced-confess-blasphemy-escaping-mob-violence/>

PATRAS MASIH

First Information Report Number: 174/18

Sections Charged: 295-C

Date Arrested: February 19, 2018

Case Status: Awaiting Trial

On February 19, 2018, Patras Masih, a 21-year-old Christian from the Dhair neighborhood of Shahdara, was accused of committing blasphemy by a mob of enraged Muslims seeking to lynch him. The mob was led by members of Tehreek-e-Labbaik Ya Rasoan Allah, an ideologically extreme group which calls on Muslims to revere the Prophet Muhammad.

According to the First Information Report filed by Muhammad Awais, Masih posted an allegedly blasphemous image on a Facebook group on January 16, 2018. According to media reports, the image depicted a man standing with his food placed on the dome of a mosque resembling the Masjid-e-Nabvi, and Islamic holy site.

When it became clear that Masih was away from the neighborhood, the mob threatened to burn down the entire Christian community. Police intervened, but also arrested several members of Masih's family. Later that evening, at around 6 p.m., Masih surrendered to police. He was then formally charged with committing blasphemy under Section 295-C of Pakistan's Penal Code.

"Patras was told by other members of the Facebook group to delete the post, but he remained adamant, after which an issue arose," Sub-Inspector Haji Munir, the lead investigator in Patras' case, told the media. "Patras is still under investigation but will soon be sent to jail." Police have also told the media that Masih confessed under questioning.

However, according to Masih's family and lawyer, Masih was not in possession of his mobile phone, which was at a repair shop, when the blasphemous image was posted. They also claim that Masih and his cousin, Sajid, were tortured into confessing by Federal Instigation Agency officers. According to local reports, Sajid tried to commit suicide by jumping out of a fourth-story window during the interrogation. To date, Masih remains in judicial custody awaiting trial.

Further Reading:

https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/christians-come-under-threat-in-pakistan-no-one-accused-of-blasphemy-is-ever-safe/2018/03/15/d5f88f46-232b-11e8-946c-9420060cb7bd_story.html?utm_term=.fd99f2e3e512

<https://www.persecution.org/2018/02/20/christian-teen-arrested-sharing-allegedly-blasphemous-content-facebook-pakistan/>

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/03/suspect-lahore-blasphemy-case-fighting-life-180303085358736.html>

<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2018/02/pakistan-800-christian-families-flee-neighbourhood-blasphemy-accusation/>

NADEEM SAMSON

First Information Report Number: 123/17

Sections Charged: 295-A; 295-B; 295-C

Date Arrested: November 24, 2017

Case Status: Awaiting Trial

On November 24, 2017, Nadeem Samson arrested after being accused by Sakhawat Dogar and Abdul Huq of committing blasphemy by posting blasphemous content on Facebook. According to Samson's family, the false blasphemy accusation was motivated by a property dispute.

Prior to the false accusation, Samson leased Dogar's house on a one-and-a-half-year agreement. According to this agreement, Samson would lend Dogar \$4,000.00 in exchange for living in Dogar's house. At the end of the year-and-a-half, Dogar would return the \$4,000.00 he borrowed and Samson would vacate Dogar's house.

A month prior to the end of the year-and-a-half agreement, Samson gave notice to Dogar that he was planning to vacate the house and expected to be repaid the \$4,000.00 Dogar had borrowed. According to Samson's family, Dogar then reached out to a relative, Abdul Huq, and conspired to accuse Samson of blasphemy.

Huq reportedly used Samson's phone number, posted on Samson's herbal medicine website, to create a fake Facebook account in Samson's name. Huq and Dogar posted blasphemous content to this Facebook account and used it to falsely accuse Samson of blasphemy.

In response to the accusations, police raided Samson's home, confiscated his mobile phone and laptop computer, and arrested Samson. In police custody, Samson was tortured into giving a false confession.

To date, Samson remains on trial for allegedly committing blasphemy and is being held in the Camp District Jail in Lahore. In April 2019, it was decided that Samson's trial would take place in the jail for his own security. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, little progress has been made in regards to this trial.

In December 2021, a petition to the Lahore High Court was either withdrawn or rejected. The official trial against Samson is yet to be heard.

Further Reading:

<http://www.pakistanchristianpost.com/head-line-news-details/6735>

<https://rightsofhuman.com/pakistani-christian-embroiled-in-worst-blasphemy-case/>

<https://www.christianpost.com/news/christian-imprisoned-for-blasphemy-seeks-help-from-biden-admin.html>

STEPHEN MASIH

First Information Report Number: 08/19

Sections Charged: 295-C

Date Arrested: March 10, 2019

Case Status: Awaiting Trial

On March 11, 2019, Stephen Masih, a 38-year-old Christian who suffers from a history of mental disability, was accused of committing blasphemy by a Muslim neighbor, Hafiz Muhammad Mudassar, in Imran Pura Badiana village, located in the Sialkot district of Punjab. As a result, Masih was arrested and charged with committing blasphemy under Section 295-C of Pakistan's Penal Code.

According to local reports, Masih got into a heated argument with his mother and sister on March 10. A Muslim neighbor got involved, and Masih reportedly used abusive language with her. The next day, a Muslim woman named Zeenat, the wife of Mudassar, came to Masih's home and told him that she would be filing a complaint with the police against him.

Later that day, a mob of Muslim men began to gather outside of Masih's home. These men attacked Masih claiming that he had committed blasphemy by making derogatory remarks against the Prophet Muhammad. Local police were called to the scene, and Masih was arrested.

According to Alia, Masih's sister, Masih did use abusive language against the Muslim woman on March 10. However, he did not make any blasphemous remarks. On June 3, 2019, Masih appeared before the lower court and had the blasphemy charges formally framed against him.

A hearing was scheduled to take place in Masih's case on April 14, 2020. However, this hearing was rescheduled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Further Reading:

<https://www.persecution.org/2019/03/13/mentally-disabled-christian-accused-blasphemy-pakistan/>

<https://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/13943/pakistan-christians-blasphemy>

<https://eptoday.com/stephen-masih-is-being-unfairly-held-in-pakistan-under-the-blasphemy-laws/>

<http://claasfamily.com/?p=2832>

SALEEM MASIH

First Information Report Number: 289/19

Sections Charged: 295-B

Date Arrested: June 15, 2019

Case Status: Released on Bail; Awaiting Trial

On June 13, 2019, Saleem Masih, age 55, was accused of committing blasphemy by burning pages of the Quran by his sister-in-law, Ayesha, in Khanewal. According to local reports, the blasphemy accusation arose out of a domestic dispute over property between Masih and Ayesha.

The animosity between Masih and Ayesha began after Ayesha divorced Masih's older brother, Sabir, eloped with his younger brother, Irfan, and converted to Islam. Disputes over family properties quickly arose following the divorce and marriage.

On January 23, 2019, Ayesha accused Masih's family of breaking into her home and stealing 30,000 PKR. A police investigation into this accusation states that the *"facts narrated in the petition are false, and no such occurrence took place."* Based on this investigation, the court dismissed Ayesha's complaint on February 28, 2019.

On June 13, Ayesha accused Masih again of illegally entering her home, stealing, but this time added desecrating a copy of the Quran. On June 14, these accusations were filed with local police, and Masih was arrested a day later on June 15.

Masih was imprisoned at District Jail Khanewal until he was granted bail on July 20, 2019. Masih and his lawyers have prepared a motion to dismiss the case and are awaiting the court to make its final decision.

Further Reading:

<https://www.persecution.org/2019/05/25/christian-family-falsely-accused-blasphemy-attacked-mob-pakistan/>

<http://pakistanchristianpost.com/head-line-news-details/7159>

https://beheardproject.com/persecuted-church/pakistani-court-grants-christian-defendant-bail-in-a-blasphemy-case?utm_source=Facebook&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=d-08212019_top-PC_seg-bhfb_con-pa-kvictoryt_typ-AR&sf107553168=1

SUNNY MUSHTAQ & NOMAN ASGHAR

First Information Report Number: 353/19

Sections Charged: 295-C

Arrest Date: June 29, 2019

Case Status: Awaiting Trial

On June 29, 2019, Sunny Mushtaq and Noman Asghar, ages 19 and 17, respectively, were accused of committing blasphemy by receiving blasphemous sketches of the Prophet Muhammad on their WhatsApp numbers. Police have charged the teens with committing blasphemy under Section 295-C of the Pakistan Criminal Code.

On June 29, Mushtaq and Asghar left their homes to play cricket and never returned home. When their families inquired about the missing teens, they were informed by friends that police had arrested the pair.

According to First Information Report #353/19, registered at the Bahawalnagar police station, Mushtaq and Asghar have been accused of receiving blasphemous sketches of the Prophet Muhammad on their WhatsApp numbers. Police also reportedly “recovered” printouts of the blasphemous sketches from Mushtaq’s backpack.

Local activists have confirmed that Mushtaq and Asghar did receive a blasphemous sketch on their smartphones. However, the sketch was sent by Bilal Ahmad, a Muslim. To date, police have not taken any action against Ahmad, the sender of the blasphemous image.

Further Reading:

<https://www.persecution.org/2019/07/05/two-christian-teenagers-charged-blasphemy-pakistan/>

<https://www.mnnonline.org/news/christian-teenagers-accused-of-blasphemy-jailed-in-pakistan/>

<http://www.asianews.it/news-en/A-19-year-old-Christian-man-arrested-in-Punjab-for-blasphemy-after-a-fight-over-a-cricket-match-47496.html>

SHAHBAZ MASIH

First Information Report Number: 1016/19

Sections Charged: 295-B

Date Arrested: December 27, 2019

Case Status: Awaiting Trial

On December 27, 2019, Shahbaz Masih and a Muslim friend, Muhammad Ishaq, were accused of committing blasphemy by Shahzaib and Ahmad in Faisalabad, Pakistan. The two were arrested by police and formally charged with violating Section 295-B of the Pakistani Criminal Code.

According to Human Rights Focus Pakistan, Masih is a well-known Christian in his community. On December 27, 2019, Masih was attacked by two Muslim men named Shahzaib and Ahmad. The men dragged Masih to a nearby landfill and beat him.

Ishaq, Masih's Muslim friend, was alerted to the attack by Masih's screams and came to his aid. Following the attack, Shahzaib and Ahmad accused Masih and Ishaq of burning pages of the Quran. A riot broke out after a nearby mosque called on local Muslims to kill both Masih and Ishaq.

Police arrested Masih and Ishaq when they arrived on the scene and took them to the local police station for questioning. After that, the pair was moved to prison, where they are still being held. According to local human rights activists, police gave in to pressure from local religious extremists to charge both Masih and Ishaq with blasphemy.

On November 10, 2020, Masih and Ishaq were granted bail by a court in Faisalabad. The pair were released from police custody after 11 months in jail. Both will likely remain in hiding until they are fully acquitted, given the sensitivity of blasphemy accusations in Pakistan.

Further Reading:

<http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Christian-and-Muslim-friends-arrested-in-Faisalabad-for-blasphemy-49024.html>

<https://www.persecution.org/2020/11/15/christian-accused-blasphemy-pakistan-released-bail/>

ANWAR MASIH

First Information Report Number: 237/2020

Sections Charged: 295-B, 295-C

Date Arrested: June 2, 2020

Case Status: Awaiting Trial

On June 2, 2020, Anwar Masih was accused of committing blasphemy by his daughter, Samreen Anwar in Lahore. In a conversation Samreen recorded on May 16, 2020, Samreen told her father she could no longer live with Christians because she had converted to Islam and was pregnant by her Muslim fiancé. In his anger, Masih allegedly shouted blasphemous and derogatory remarks against the prophet Muhammed.

With the recording as evidence, police immediately arrested Masih and charged him with committing blasphemy under Section 295-C of the Pakistan Penal Code. If convicted, Masih faces a mandatory death sentence.

Lawyers working on Masih's case applied for bail, but had this application rejected. On September 9, 2020, Anwar was produced before the court of the magistrate for the regular hearing. His next court hearing regarding judicial remand is scheduled for September 23rd.

On November 29, 2003, Anwar Masih was charged with making derogatory remarks against the Prophet Muhammed. Masih was charged after he reportedly asked his formerly neighbor, Chaudhary Naseer, who had converted to Islam, why he had grown a beard and converted to Islam in August 2003. The Lahore High Court acquitted Masih from the blasphemy charges on December 24, 2004.

Further Reading:

<https://www.irishcatholic.com/pakistani-christian-accused-of-blasphemy-by-wife-and-daughter/>

<http://www.pakistanchristianpost.com/head-line-news-details/7388>

SOHAIL MASIH

First Information Report Number: 894 /20

Sections Charged: 295-A, 295-C

Date Arrested: August 5, 2020

Case Status: Awaiting Trial

On August 5, 2020, Sohail Masih was arrested and charged with committing blasphemy under Section 295-A and 295-C of the Pakistani Penal Code. Masih was arrested and charged with blasphemy after he allegedly posted a blasphemous comment on Facebook during the Eid al-Adha festival.

According to local reports, Masih posted a comment that sins were not taken away by sacrificing animals. He went on to allegedly called the Night of Ascension, Lailat al Miraj, a lie. Below the exact wording of Masih's alleged Facebook comment can be seen.

"It is not possible that the blood of goats and bulls can wash away sins. The incident of Miraj is based on a lie."

Allama Muhammad Abdul Sattar, a worship leader at a local mosque, filed a First Information Report (FIR) against Masih after two members of Sattar's madrasa showed him the Facebook comment. Sattar said Masih's words were extremely offensive to Muslims, mocking Islam's principles during a sacred festival.

Initially, Masih was taken into police custody for his own safety. However, due to pressure from local fundamentalists, Masih was arrested and formally charged with blasphemy. To date, Masih is still awaiting trial.

Further Reading:

<https://www.persecution.org/2020/08/10/christian-arrested-blasphemy-charges-pakistan/>

<https://aleteia.org/2020/08/13/christians-facebook-post-leads-to-blasphemy-charges-in-pakistan/>

<https://www.ucanews.com/news/another-day-another-blasphemy-case-in-pakistan/89078>

DAVID MASIH

First Information Report Number: 460/2020

Sections Charged: 295-B

Date Arrested: August 30, 2020

Case Status: Awaiting Trial

On August 30, 2020, David Masih was arrested for allegedly committing blasphemy in the city of Nowshera, located in Pakistan Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. Masih's arrest came days after the video of torn pages of a Quran being discovered in a drain in Risalpure went viral on social media.

According to local reports, torn pages of Quran were discovered in a drain by local residents of Risalpure. A video of this discovery was posted to social media on August 27, 2020, and reportedly went viral.

Day later, on August 30, 2020, police arrested David Masih and charged him with committing blasphemy under Section 295-B of the Pakistan Penal Code. Masih was reportedly identified as a suspect after police received complaints from local Muslims.

Masih reportedly confessed to tearing the pages of the Quran and reportedly told investigators that he tore did this to practice witchcraft. However, to date, police have not made a conclusive statement to implicate Masih with the torn pages in the August 27 video.

Masih is still awaiting his trial and he faces life imprisonment if convicted.

Further Reading:

<https://www.persecution.org/2020/09/01/pakistani-christian-arrested-blasphemy-pages-quran-discovered-drain/>

<https://www.ucanews.com/news/another-pakistani-christian-accused-of-blasphemy/89351>

RAJA WARIS

First Information Report Number: 1122/20

Sections Charged: 295-A, 298-A

Date Arrested: December 27, 2020

Case Status: Awaiting Trial

On December 27, 2020, Raja Waris was arrested for committing blasphemy in the city of Lahore, located in Pakistan's Punjab province. Waris' arrest came days after he was accused of offending the religious sentiments of Muslims by publishing a faith-based post on Facebook on December 22.

According to local sources, Waris publically apologized for making the December 22 post and this issue was resolved on December 23. However, on December 26, a mob of hundreds of Muslims gathered in Waris' neighborhood of Charar and threatened to behead Waris and set fire to Christian homes.

Hundreds of anti-riot police were deployed to Charar to contain the mob. To keep the situation from escalating, local church leadership met with police and agreed to hand Waris over for arrest. On December 27, Waris was arrested and charged with committing blasphemy under Section 295-A and Section 298-A of Pakistan's blasphemy laws. Copies of the First Information Report (FIR # 1122/20) were shown to the leaders of the mob to deescalate the situation in Charar.

If convicted, Waris could face as many as 10 years in prison for committing "*deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings.*"

Further Readings:

<https://www.persecution.org/2020/12/27/hundreds-pakistani-christian-families-flee-neighborhood-following-threats-violence/>

<https://morningstarnews.org/2021/01/christian-lay-leader-arrested-on-blasphemy-charges-in-pakistan/>

TABEETA NAZIR GILL

First Information Report Number: 74/21

Sections Charged: 295-C

Date Arrested: January 28, 2021

Case Status: Awaiting Trial

On January 28, 2021, Tabeeta Nazir Gill was falsely accused of committing blasphemy while working at Sobhraj Maternity Hospital in Karachi, a hospital where she had been a nurse for nine years. She was later taken into police custody and charged with committing blasphemy under Section 295-C of Pakistan's blasphemy laws.

According to local sources, the head nurse at Sobhraj Maternity Hospital issued orders that medical staff may not receive tips or deal with money from patients. Gill reportedly reminded a Muslim coworker of these orders when she saw the coworker collect money from a patient.

In response, the Muslim coworker falsely accused Gill of committing blasphemy and incited violence against her colleague. Videos of hospital staff beating Gill surfaced on social media and Gill was reportedly tied up with ropes, tortured, and locked in a room before being taken into police custody.

However, police released Gill, handing her over to her family, after a short investigation did not find any evidence that Gill had committed blasphemy. Gill and her family soon moved to an unknown location fearing vigilante violence.

On January 29, a mob of hundreds of Muslims gathered at the local police station demanding that blasphemy charges be officially filed against Gill. In response, local police registered FIR # 74/21 against Gill, charging that she had committed blasphemy under Section 295-C of Pakistan's blasphemy laws.

Gill and her family remain in hiding as the accusation against Gill remains under police investigation.

Further Readings:

<https://www.persecution.org/2021/01/29/christian-nurse-pakistan-falsely-accused-blasphemy-muslim-coworker/>

<https://morningstarnews.org/2021/01/attacked-christian-nurse-charged-with-blasphemy-in-pakistan/>

HAROON AYUB MASIH & SALAMAT MANSHA MASIH

First Information Report Number: 61/21

Sections Charged: 295-A, 295-B, 295-C

Date Arrested: February 13, 2021

Case Status: Awaiting Trial

On February 13, 2021, Haroon Ayub Masih and Salamat Mansha Masih, two Christians, were charged committing blasphemy by Haroon Ahmad, a Muslim they met while in Model Town Park, located in Lahore.

According to the First Information Report (FIR # 61/21), the two Christians gave Ahmad a Christian book entitled “Water of Life” and began to discuss the divinity of the prophets and Jesus Christ. This discussion with Ahmad turned into an argument that ended with Ahmad accusing the Christians of making derogatory remarks against Islam.

Lawyers representing the Haroon and Salamat claim the events in the FIR are not entirely accurate. According to these lawyers, the Christians were discussing the Bible in the park when they were approached by Ahmad and his friend. Ahmad told the Christians they were not allowed to read the Bible in public, which the Christians both disagreed.

Following this disagreement, the Muslims began to question the Christians about their faith and asked if they had any reading material to help them understand the Bible. Haroon then gave Ahmad the “Water of Life” following his request for literature.

Haroon reportedly returned home while Salamat remained in Model Town Park. After a few minutes, Ahmad and his friends attacked Salamat and accused him of committing blasphemy. Salamat was arrested on February 13, but Haroon was able to secure pre-arrest bail and agreed to surrender himself to police custody on February 24.

Police have charged the two Christians with committing blasphemy under Sections 295-A, 295-B, and 295-C of Pakistan’s Penal Code. If found guilty, the two Christians could face execution as Section 295-C carries a mandatory death sentence.

Further Readings:

<https://www.persecution.org/2021/02/15/two-christian-evangelists-charged-committing-blasphemy-pakistan/>

<https://morningstarnews.org/2021/02/two-christians-studying-bible-in-park-charged-with-blasphemy/>

MARIYUM LAL & NEWSH AROOJ

First Information Report Number: 347/21

Sections Charged: 295-B

Date Arrested: April 9, 2021

Case Status: Awaiting Trial

On April 9, 2021, Mariyum Lal and Newsh Arooj, two Christian nurses working at Civil Hospital in Faisalabad, were falsely accused of committing blasphemy by a Muslim coworker. Local sources report that Lal was directed to remove old wall hangings and stickers from a wall by Rukhsana, a senior nurse at the hospital. Following Rukhsana's instructions, Lal removed the wall-hangings and stickers.

Rukhsana, who reportedly holds a grudge against Lal, provoked other Muslim staffers at Civil Hospital by claiming Lal desecrated wall hangings that contained Quranic verses. In response, a Muslim staffer at the hospital's pharmacy, named Waqas, attacked Lal with a knife as she was attending a patient in the hospital's medical ward. Lal received several injuries to her arm but survived the attack.

The false blasphemy allegation against Lal soon spread to the broader community and a mob of enraged Muslims staged a protest outside of Civil Hospital. Members of the mob demanded Lal be arrested and hanged for committing blasphemy.

Police registered a First Information Report (FIR # 347/21) in connection with the blasphemy allegation. According to the FIR, Mariyum Lal and Newsh Arooj are both accused of violating Pakistan's blasphemy laws under Section 295-B.

Further Readings:

<https://www.persecution.org/2021/04/09/two-christian-nurses-pakistan-falsely-accused-blasphemy-muslim-coworker/>

<https://morningstarnews.org/2021/04/christian-nurses-arrested-under-blasphemy-law-in-pakistan/>

SHAGUFTA KIRAN

First Information Report Number: N/A

Sections Charged: 295-A; 295-B; 298; 298-A

Date Arrested: July 29, 2021

Case Status: Awaiting Trial

On July 29, 2021, Shagufta Kiran was accused of committing blasphemy and arrested in an armed police raid on her home in Islamabad. Kiran was later charged under Sections 295-A and 295-C of Pakistan's blasphemy laws.

Karin's family reported that dozens of policemen and members of law enforcement entered their house and began harassing the family. Authorities took possession of phones, laptops, and other valuables as a part of their search. The entire family, including Karin's two sons and daughter, were arrested without an arrest warrant.

According to Rafiq Masih, Kiran's husband, Karin was arrested because she is a member of a WhatsApp chat group where someone shared an allegedly blasphemous post. Karin was accused of committing blasphemy against Islam despite not being the author of the post in question.

"Shagufta was unaware of the post but has been accused of forwarding it," Masih explained. *"Shagufta has denied this allegation."*

Karin's husband and children were eventually released from police custody. However, the family went into hiding after encountering hostilities from neighbors. Karin is jailed at the Central Jail Adiala located in Rawalpindi. She remains there awaiting trial.

Further Readings:

<https://www.persecution.org/2021/08/10/christian-pakistan-accused-blasphemy-simply-receiving-text/>

<https://morningstarnews.org/2021/09/islamic-extremists-charge-christian-woman-with-blasphemy/>

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