

Summary

Over the months of April, May, and June of 2021, International Christian Concern (ICC) documented 27 incidents of persecution against the Christian community of Pakistan. These incidents included false blasphemy accusations, abductions, forced conversions, forced marriages, physical violence, destruction of property, discrimination, and even religiously motivated murders.

Regarding Pakistan's notorious blasphemy laws and false accusations made against Christians, two nurses working at Civil Hospital in Faisalabad were falsely accused of committing blasphemy on April 9. A Muslim coworker, who reportedly harbored a grudge against one of the two nurses, accused the women of desecrating wall hangings that contained Quranic verses.

This accusation marked a continuation of false blasphemy accusations being leveled against Christian nurses documented in ICC in the first quarter of 2021. The second quarter of 2021, however, also provided a positive development for Shafqat Emmanuel and his wife, Shagufta, two Christians sentenced to death under the blasphemy laws since 2014.

On June 3, Justice Syed Shehbaz Rizvi and Justice Anwar-ul-Haq of the Lahore High Court acquitted Shafqat and Shagufta after spending almost eight years in prison for allegedly committing blasphemy through text message.

On June 18, 2013, Muhammad Hussain, a Muslim cleric at a mosque in Gojra received blasphemous text messages from a phone number allegedly registered to Shagufta. Hussain reportedly showed these text messages to his lawyer, Anwar Mansoor Goraya, who claimed to later receive further blasphemous messages from Shagufta, written in English.

On July 21, 2013, Shagufta and Shafqat were arrested and charged with blasphemy under Sections 295-B and 295-C of Pakistan's Penal Code. Shafqat claims that, to extract a false confession, Gojra City Police tortured him in front of his wife and children.

The Christian couple claimed that Hussain's accusation was motivated by a minor quarrel between the couple's children and their neighbors, which took place six months before the accusation. Shagufta claimed that Hussain conspired with a friend to steal her National Identity Card and used it to purchase a SIM card in her name. Using this SIM card, Hussain sent blasphemous text messages to himself.

Despite this lack of evidence, the Sessions Court of Toba Tek Singh sentenced both Shagufta and Shafqat to death on April 4, 2014. Since 2014, the couple was jailed separately with Shafqat in Faisalabad District Jail and Shagufta in Multan Jail. In prison, Shafqat's health quickly deteriorated due to a lack of medical care

for a spinal injury he sustained in 2004.

In the past three months, ICC has also documented a surge in abductions, sexual assaults, force conversions, and forced marriages targeting Pakistan's Christian community. At least five girls were sexually assaulted, and six others abducted, forcefully converted, and forcefully married to one of their abductors.

Among the most high-profile incidents of abduction, forced conversion, and forced marriage was the case of Nayab Gill.

Nayab, a 13-year-old Christian girl was abducted, forcefully converted to Islam, and forcefully married her 30-year-old Muslim abductor in Gujranwala on May 20. Shahid Gill, Nayab's father, reports she worked as a helper at a beauty salon owned by her abductor and was abducted while at work. A detailed breakdown of Nayab's case can be found in the Issue Highlight section of this report.

ICC also documented three incidents in which Christian properties were destroyed by Muslims. In all these cases, a property dispute between a Muslim and Christian was decided in favor of the Christian. The Muslims reacted by destroying the properties legally owned by the Christians. To date, little to no justice has been provided to the Christian victims.

For example, William Masih, a Christian, purchased a house from Tariq Hussain, a respectful Muslim landowner several years ago. Hussain died after he sold the property to Masih.

Ghafooran Bibi, Hussain's sister, claimed to own the property and attempted to evict Masih through court action. However, the judge overseeing the case dismissed the petition in favor of Masih, citing legal documents proving Masih's claim on the property.

On April 1, Bibi led an attack on Masih's house and set it on fire while he and his mother worked in the field, destroying everything he owned. Masih and his mother filed a First Information Report (FIR) against the arsonists. However, local police have not responded to the complaint.

Methodology

The incidents documented in this factsheet were gathered from various sources in Pakistan, including news reports, social media posts, and personal testimonies. ICC verified each documented incident through direct fact-finding visits, telephone calls, or an examination of documents held by local authorities.

Verified cases were sorted into one of seven incident categories: blasphemy allegation, forced conversion/forced marriage, discrimination, physical violence, religiously motivated murder, attacks on places of worship, and intimidation/threats.

In the chart below, all verified incidents of persecution are dated, categorized, and geographically located. In some incidents, the name of the victim is not reported due to security concerns, or the incident did not target a single individual or community. ICC is aware that a significant number of incidents in Pakistan go unreported. The data reflected in the chart below can only be viewed as a small reflection of the plight of Pakistani Christians documented and verified by ICC.

Incident Chart

No.	Date	Victim Name	Location	Incident Type	Brief Details
1	April 1, 2021	William Masih	Lahore	Physical Violence	After a Christian family won a court case their house was set on fire.
2	April 1, 2021	Venus Bibi	Sheikhupura	Forced Conversion / Forced Marriage	A Christian mother of five was abducted and sexually abused.
3	April 9, 2021	Newish Arooj	Faisalabad	Blasphemy Allegation	Two nurses, one of them Christian, were falsely accused of committing blasphemy against Islam.
4	April 13, 2021	N/A	Lahore	Discrimination	A job advertisement discriminating against Christians was published in the newspaper.
5	April 20, 2021	Harry Masih	Lahore	Physical Violence	A young Christian was stabbed by a Muslim over a religious dispute.
6	April 27, 2021	Neha Bibi	Islamabad	Forced Conversion / Forced Marriage	A Christian girl was kidnapped, raped, and forcefully converted to Islam.
7	April 30, 2021	Seven Christian Families	Toba Tek Sing	Physical Violence	Seven Christian families had their homes set on fire by a woman attempting to take their property.
8	May 3, 2021	Victor Masih	Mian Chunnu	Discrimination	Six acres of agricultural land owned by a Christian was stolen by a Muslim.
9	May 5, 2021	Unidentified Christian Janitor	Nankana Sahib	Physical Violence	Police tortured and charged a Christian janitor with blasphemy because he refused to accuse the French president and ambassador of blasphemous caricature.

10	May 10, 2021	Aman Bibi	Sheikhupura	Physical Violence	An 8-year-old girl was raped by a Muslim man.
11	May 11, 2021	Unidentified Church	Sheikhupura	Discrimination	A group of Muslims took over Church property and threatened the congregation against going to court.
12	May 15, 2021	Shanza Bibi	Sheikhupura	Forced Conversion / Forced Marriage	A 14-year-old Christian girl was kidnapped and converted to Islam.
13	May 16, 2021	N/A	Punjab	Discrimination	A job advertisement discriminating against Christians was published in the newspaper.
14	May 20, 2021	Unidentified Christian Family	Sahiwal	Physical Violence	The home of a Christian family was set on fire after they refused to convert.
15	May 21, 2021	Rukhsana	Karachi	Physical Violence	A teenage Christian girl was kidnapped and raped by a group of Muslim boys.
16	May 24, 2021	Arif Masih	Gojra	Religiously Motivated Murder	A Christian man was poisoned after protecting his sister from an attack and witnessing against the perpetrators.
17	May 26, 2021	Nayab Bill	Gujranwala	Forced Conversion / Forced Marriage	A 13-year-old Christian girl was kidnapped and forcefully converted to Islam.
18	May 27, 2021	Shiza Waris	Karachi	Physical Violence	A 14-year-old Christian girl was kidnapped and raped.
19	June 7, 2021	Sonia Irfan	Khushab	Physical Violence	Four Muslim men kidnapped a teenage Christian girl and took turns raping her.
20	June 12, 2021	Danish Masih	Faisalabad	Physical Violence	A young Christian boy was kidnaped and sexually assaulted by Muslims.

21	June 19, 2021	Shehzad Masih	Faisalabad	Religiously Motivated Murder	A 35-year-old Christian laborer was killed by two Muslim men who burst his intestines by inserting high pressure air into his Anus.
22	June 22, 2021	Zafar Bhatti	Rawalpindi	Blasphemy Allegation	A sessions court upheld a blasphemy conviction.
23	June 22, 2021	Suzanna	Lahore	Physical Violence	A minor Christian girl was raped by her a teacher while at school.
24	June 24, 2021	Shama	Karachi	Forced Conversion / Forced Marriage	A young Christian girl was kidnapped from her home.
25	June 26, 2021	Riaz Gill	Karachi	Intimidation / Threats	Muslim staff at Jinnah hospital refused to work under the leadership of a Christian and therefore, they tortured, abused, and forced him to stepdown from his position.
26	June 26, 2021	N/A	Khybar Pakhtunkhawa	Discrimination	A job advertisement discriminating against Christians was published in the newspaper.
27	June 26, 2021	Abroo Majeed	Wazirabad	Forced Conversion / Forced Marriage	A young girl was kidnapped with the intent to be forcefully converted, however she managed to escape her captors.

Issue Highlight

Over the 2nd Quarter of 2021, ICC documented a spike in cases of abduction, sexual assault, forced conversion, and forced marriage endured by Pakistan's Christian community. In total, ICC documented 11 cases of persecution with five cases of sexual assault and six cases of forced conversion and forced marriage.

According to a 2014 study by the Movement for Solidarity and Peace Pakistan, as many as 1,000 Christian and Hindu women and girls are abducted, forcefully married, and forcefully converted to Islam every year.

Many victims are minors taken from their families, sexually assaulted, married to an assailant, and held in captivity justified by falsified marriage and conversion documents. Violence, threats, and grooming tactics are used to compel victims to make statements in court supporting their captors.

The issue of religion is also often injected into these cases to place religious minorities at a disadvantage. Playing upon religious biases, perpetrators know they can cover up and justify their crimes by introducing the element of religion.

In May 2021, a 13-year-old Christian girl was abducted, forcefully married, and forcefully converted to Islam in Gujranwala. Despite evidence of the Christian girl's minor status, Pakistani courts awarded custody of the girl to a 30-year-old Muslim man claiming to be her husband.

Nayab Gill, age 13, worked as a helper at a beauty salon owned by Saddam Hayat, a 30-year-old Muslim man. According to Shahid Gill, Nayab's father, Hayat allowed Nayab to work at his salon while schools were closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Hayat promised to pay Nayab 10,000 rupees per month. However, Hayat stopped paying Nayab after several months.

On May 20, Nayab went missing. Gill and his wife went to Hayat's home in search for Nayab, but Hayat's wife and children claimed he was not home. Later in the day, however, Hayat contacted the Christian couple and helped them search for their missing daughter.

Hayat helped Nayab's mother fill out a missing person report. However, Hayat convinced Nayab's mother not to mention that Nayab worked for him or that he used to take her to and from the beauty salon.

"My wife unknowingly trusted him and wrote what he told her to write in the application," Gill told Morning Star News. "On May 26, we were informed by the police that Nayab was in the Darul Aman [women's shelter] since May 21. In an application submitted to a magistrate's court, Nayab claimed she had willfully converted to Islam a month ago and her life was at risk from her Christian family."

According to this application, Nayab also claimed to be 19 years old, and an Islamic marriage certificate was registered on May 20 claiming she had married Hayat.

Nayab's family was able to meet with Nayab on May 26 in the women's shelter. During this visit, Nayab reportedly told her grandmother she wanted to return home and was willing to state this in an application to the court. Morning Star News reported that the family was forcefully driven away from the women's shelter by police and Hayat after they were informed of the family's presence by the shelter's staff.

On May 27, Nayab appeared in court and reiterated her initial statement claiming she was 19 years old and had converted to Islam of her own free will.

"We told the judge that she was lying about her age under duress," Gill told Morning Star News. "She had bruises on her face, and her eyes were also red, which should have caught the judge's attention, but he ignored it."

Nayab's parents presented official documents proving Nayab was born on October 16, 2007. Special Judicial Magistrate Qaiser Jameel, however, ignored this evidence and awarded custody of Nayab to Hayat. This decision was appealed to the Lahore High Court and on July 1 Justice Shahram Sarwar Chaudhry

agreed with the lower court's decision to award custody of Nayab to Hayat. This decision has now been appealed to the Supreme Court of Pakistan.

Cases of forced conversion and forced marriage have become so prevalent that Bishop Azad Marshall, Moderator Bishop of the Church of Pakistan, filed a petition with the Supreme Court of Pakistan, under Article 184(3) of the Constitution of Pakistan, calling for protections for Christian girls from forced conversion and forced marriage.

According to the petition, Christian girls who fall victim to abduction, forced conversion, and forced marriage receive little help from courts in Pakistan. Pressures and threats outside the courtroom are not taken into consideration when victims give declarations of consent before the court. Also, Islamic jurisprudence is used to justify acts criminalized by secular law.

On July 14, Supreme Court Justice Mushir Alam rejected Bishop Marshall's petition stating it was improperly filed because it did not address an individual case or grievance.

Bishop Marshall has said he will re-petition the Supreme Court of Pakistan on this issue and will attach his petition to the case of Nayab Gill. It remains to be seen whether Pakistani authorities will take action to curb the growing threat of abductions, forced conversions, and forced marriages currently terrorizing the country's religious minorities.

U.S. Policy Recommendations

Advocacy on persecution issues in Pakistan must carefully consider the context within which each individual case takes place, both locally and in the country as a whole, and will take different forms depending on context.

The advocacy audience usually includes the Pakistani government, the religious majority and minority communities, the U.S. government, like-minded Western governments, and other stakeholders.

The U.S. and others should consider how focus on areas such as education, economic development, and political empowerment could move the needle on religious freedom in Pakistan. Still, while development in these areas would be helpful the government of Pakistan must accept a definition of religious freedom that accords with Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This includes protection of the right to change one's identity at any time in life.

ICC recommends that the US adopt or strengthen the following policy stances:

First, the U.S. should communicate that Pakistan must swiftly and fairly adjudicate blasphemy cases and others like them as a condition of removing Pakistan 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 institutions such as the U.S. Department of State and USCIRF should share this publicly as well.

Second, the U.S. should use its foreign aid to Pakistan, including military aid, to tangibly and visibly advance the above policy priorities. The U.S. should use its economic power to create realistic conditions for Pakistan's improvement, especially in the areas of religious freedom and the country's blasphemy laws.

Third, the U.S. Departments of State and Treasury should consider how their sanctioning authorities could be brought to bear on the pattern of unjustified imprisonment regularly imposed on Pakistan's religious minorities. Individual sanctions on those involved in the abuse of Pakistan's blasphemy laws could have great effect. In addition to the sanctioning authorities, the U.S. should include visa flags and specific travel bans on individuals known for abusing the blasphemy laws or who are otherwise complicit in persecuting religious minorities.

Fourth, the U.S. should work multilaterally with like-minded governments in the South Asia region and around the world to push Pakistan towards greater religious freedom. A robust coalition of governments could impose sanctions and leverage aid far more effectively than could the U.S. on its own.

Pakistan's religious minorities deserve real change, and the U.S. should lead in the fight to accomplish that for them.

