

URGENT ACTION

ELDERLY MAN IMPRISONED FOR READING QU'RAN

A British man of the Ahmadi sect has been imprisoned in Pakistan for reciting a passage from the Qu'ran, a prohibited act for Ahmadis under the country's blasphemy laws.

Masud Ahmad, a homeopathic practitioner, aged 72, was arrested at his pharmacy in Lahore on 25 November after two men secretly filmed him reading aloud a passage from the Qu'ran.

The Ahmaddiya community are legally barred from calling themselves Muslim, and professing, practicing and propagating their faith as Muslims.

Masud Ahmad appears to have been maliciously targeted because he is an Ahmadi. The two men, reportedly pretending to be patients, came to his pharmacy and asked Masud Ahmad questions about the Ahmadiyya faith and Islam. Masud Ahmad responded by referring to the Qu'ran and read out a translated verse in Urdu. The men then passed on the film to the local police who arrested Masud Ahmad under Section 298C of the blasphemy laws for "posing as a Muslim". He is currently being detained in prison at City District Jail in Lahore.

Masud Ahmad opened his homeopathic dispensary when he returned to Pakistan in 1982. An elderly man, he had major operations to remove a tumour in 2010, and relatives are concerned that his health will deteriorate in prison. There have been several court hearings but a verdict has not yet been reached and bail has so far been denied. Masud Ahmad remains in prison.

Please write immediately in English, Urdu or your own language:

- Calling on the authorities to release Masud Ahmad immediately and unconditionally;
- Calling on the authorities to take immediate measures to guarantee the safety of Masud Ahmad and his family;
- Expressing concern that the current blasphemy laws are a threat to freedom of religion and thought, are used maliciously to settle personal disputes and target religious minorities, and urging the government to amend or abolish the blasphemy laws to prevent this.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 31 JANUARY 2014 TO:

Minister for Interior

Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan
Minister for Interior
Room 404, 4th Floor, R Block
Pakistan Secretariat
Islamabad, Pakistan
Fax: +92-51-920 2624
Email: ministry.interior@gmail.com
Salutation: Dear Minister Khan

Chief Minister, Punjab

Mian Mohammad Shahbaz Sharif
Chief Minister Punjab
Chief Minister's Office
7, Club Road, GOR I
Lahore, Pakistan
Fax: +92 42 9920 3310
Salutation: Dear Chief Minister Sharif

And copies to:

Minister of Law, Justice and Human Rights
Pervaiz Rashid
Minister of Law, Justice and Human Rights
Room 305, S Block
Pakistan Secretariat
Islamabad, Pakistan
Fax: +92 51 921 0062
Email: contact@molaw.gov.pk

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.

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

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Ahmadiyya are a minority religious group who consider themselves Muslims but the majority of Pakistan's Muslim population view them as heretical. Ahmadiyya community was declared non-Muslim in 1974, and a number of laws were subsequently passed which made it a criminal offence for Ahmadis to profess, practice or preach their faith. Under sections 298B and 298C of the Pakistan Penal Code, part of the blasphemy laws, it is a criminal offence for Ahmadis to call themselves Muslims, to employ names and terminology associated with Islam, to use Muslim practices of worship and to propagate their faith.

Every year, dozens of Ahmadis are charged with offences relating to their religious practices, including calling for prayers, preaching their faith or calling their place of worship a 'mosque'. Separate from criminal sanction by the state, individuals accused of blasphemy, whether they are Ahmadiyya or belong to another religious group, also risk attacks by private citizens. For example, in March 2013 a large mob went on a rampage and destroyed several homes in the Joseph Colony Christian neighbourhood in the city of Lahore after a Christian labourer was accused of blasphemy by a Muslim friend following a drunken argument. Several Christians were injured in the violence and most were forced to flee the area for a number of days. Although many of the perpetrators were arrested the authorities have been slow to progress their prosecution in the courts while witnesses and members of the Joseph Colony Christian community remain in fear of reprisals if they give evidence in court.

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

The UN Human Rights Committee noted in its General Comment No. 34, that "Prohibitions of displays of lack of respect for a religion or other belief system, including blasphemy laws, are incompatible with the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights]," except in specific circumstances where individuals are advocating "national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence" [Article 20 paragraph 2 of the Covenant]. Additionally the Committee said, "it would be impermissible for any such laws to discriminate in favour of or against one or certain religions or belief systems."

Name: Masud Ahmad

Gender m/f: Male

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