
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL NEWS SERVICE 266/94

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NEWS SERVICE ITEMS: EXTERNAL - **PAKISTAN** (reactive item, not being sent to press from IS)

PLEASE NOTE: Christine Haenn, press officer at AIUSA, will be coordinating media activities around the Miami Summit on 9/10 December. A document relating to the Summit (AI index: AMR 01/01/94) was sent out in last week's Weekly Mailing of. There will be a press conference in Miami on 1 December and a rally on 10 December. The IS will not be producing a news release to go with the document, but the comments to be made by Bill Schulz, Director of AIUSA, at the press conference will be sent out in the News Service as soon as possible for your information. Americas press officers will be liaising with Christine Haenn on media work around the summit, if any press officers outside the Americas would like to do work on this also please contact her through the Washington office of AIUSA (tel: +1 212 807 8400) for further information and updates.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS RELEASES

Pakistan - 24/25/28 November - The research team returned from their mission to Pakistan at the end of last week. Unfortunately they were unable to get the individual case material on ill-treatment of women and rape in custody that they were hoping for so there will not be a news item on this subject. SEE NEWS SERVICE 254/94

Bosnia - 21 December - SEE NEWS SERVICE 265/94

Sudan - 25 January - SEE NEWS SERVICE 261

Turkey - 8 February - SEE NEWS SERVICE 261

** Northern Iraq - 28 February ** - Please note new embargo date. The release date of this report has been pushed back slightly to avoid clashing with specific debates during the UN Commission.

TARGETED AND LIMITED NEWS RELEASES

News Service 266/94

AI INDEX: ASA 33/WU 07/94

28 NOVEMBER 1994

PAKISTAN: ACQUITTAL OF CHRISTIAN PRISONER OF CONSCIENCE SENTENCED TO DEATH
ON BLASPHEMY CHARGE

Following Lahore High Court's acquittal yesterday of a Christian sentenced to death for blasphemy in 1992, Amnesty International is again calling on the Government of Pakistan to introduce legislation which would prevent the abuse of Pakistan's blasphemy law and similar miscarriages of justice.

According to Amnesty International, Gul Masih's story illustrates the many possibilities of abuse allowed by the vague formulation of the law.

He was arrested on 14 December 1991 after a neighbour filed a complaint against him alleging he had uttered blasphemous words during a quarrel. At the subsequent trial neither of the two eyewitnesses to the quarrel corroborated the prosecution's story, and Gul Masih's conviction and death sentence were based solely on the statement of the complainant. Nor did the judge consider the frequent demonstrations both inside and outside the courtroom by Muslim clerics demanding that Gul Masih be hanged to be prejudicial against his case.

Despite previous announcements by the Government of Pakistan that it would introduce procedural changes which would curb the abuse of the blasphemy law, no concrete legislative measures have yet been adopted.

Amnesty International is still concerned for Gul Masih's safety, despite his release from prison -- two other Christians previously acquitted of blasphemy charges have received death threats since their release and are forced to live in hiding.

Those now remaining in detention in Pakistan for blasphemy charges are Arshad Javed -- a mentally disturbed Muslim man -- who has been on death row since February 1993, and around 10 people in judicial custody. There are also several dozen people, mostly members of the Ahmadiyya community, charged with various religious offenses who are free on bail.

The death penalty is the mandatory punishment under Pakistan's Penal Code for anyone convicted of "defiling the sacred name of the Holy Prophet". No one has so far been judicially executed after being found guilty of blasphemy, but at least four Christians charged with blasphemy have died, one in suspicious circumstances in jail and three at the hands of armed attackers.

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