

AI Index: PRE 01/327/2012  
05 July 2012

## **Pakistan: Bahawalpur lynching chilling reminder of dangers of blasphemy laws**

Members of a baying mob who lynched a man accused of breaching Pakistan's blasphemy laws must be brought to justice as a matter of urgency, Amnesty International said.

On Wednesday 4 July, residents in the town of Channigoth in Bahawalpur, Punjab province accused a homeless man of burning a Quran, an offence punishable by life imprisonment.

Local police detained the man, whose identity remains unknown, but before they could investigate the claim a group numbering more than a thousand gathered outside the station demanding that police kill the suspect there and then.

When police attempts to calm the crowd failed, the group attacked and eventually dragged the man out of the station and beat him to death. Witnesses said people poured petrol on his dead body and set it alight.

At least five members of the mob and as many police were injured in the clashes.

"We recognise the extreme challenge faced by police when confronted by over a thousand people baying for blood," said Polly Truscott, Amnesty International's South Asia Director.

"But police efforts will have come to nothing if Punjab authorities do not urgently bring the perpetrators to justice in trials consistent with international standards."

"Failure to do so effectively sends the message that anyone can commit outrageous abuses and attempt to excuse them as defence of religious sentiments."

"Pakistan authorities must also urgently reform blasphemy laws to ensure they cannot be used maliciously to settle disputes or enable private citizens to take matters into their own hands."

The blasphemy laws' vague formulation, along with inadequate investigation by authorities and intimidation by militant religious groups has promoted vigilantism in Pakistan, especially in the Punjab.

Religious minorities have been disproportionately accused of blasphemy, but a large proportion of victims are from the Muslim majority.