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United Kingdom**

**Date: 6 February 2015**

**PAKISTAN: @Salamat Masih and Rehmat Masih charged with the death penalty**

On 9 February two Pakistani Christians, Salamat Masih, a 14-year-old boy, and Rehmat Masih, were sentenced to death for blasphemy by a lower court in Lahore, Pakistan. They were also sentenced to two years' hard labour and fined 25,000 rupees each. Amnesty International considers Salamat Masih and Rehmat Masih to be prisoners of conscience who should not have been tried at all; it believes that the charges were maliciously brought against them and that they may not have received a fair trial. For example, Salamat Masih is reported to have been wholly illiterate at the time of the alleged offence; furthermore the court does not appear to have taken into account the fact that there was no material evidence for the alleged offence as the complainant, the mosque's prayer leader, had reportedly wiped away the offending words from the walls of the mosque. In addition Islamists are also reported to have frequently interfered with court hearings by shouting slogans and demanding the hanging of the three accused Christians, thereby possibly prejudicing the judges.

On 11 May 1993, a prayer leader of a mosque in Kot Ladhia, near Gujranwala, Punjab province, lodged a complaint that three Christians, Salamat Masih, Rehmat Masih and Manzoor Masih had scribbled words on the wall of the mosque which were derogatory of the Prophet Mohammad. They were arrested on the same day on charges of blasphemy: an offence which carries a mandatory death sentence. Inflammatory posters calling for the death of the three men appeared soon after their arrest and processions began demanding that they be hanged. During trial hearings, Islamists shouted slogans and interfered with proceedings. The defendants' families and lawyers received death threats.

In an attack by Islamists in April 1994, Manzoor Masih, was murdered and Salamat Masih, Rehmat Masih and John Joseph, a Christian human rights activist who escorted them, were injured (see UA 137/94, ASA 33/02/94, 6 April 1994, and follow-up ASA 33/06/94, 8 June). The three assailants were arrested several days later, but though identified by several eye-witnesses, they were released on bail in an unusually lenient decision.

The latest hearing of the Manzoor Masih murder case was due to take place on 12 February in Lahore. Amnesty International fears for the safety of John Joseph, who is now the key witness of the murder. He has received death threats from Islamists in Lahore who are reported to be celebrating the death sentences of the two Christians.

Although Salamat Masih and Rehmat Masih have the right of appeal to the High Court, they may have to spend many months as prisoners of conscience in death cells awaiting its outcome.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Reports indicate that, prior to the alleged graffiti incident in May 1993, Salamat Masih had argued with a neighbourhood boy over pet pigeons; the boy then told village elders that he had seen Salamat Masih write on the mosque wall. Salamat told the non-governmental Human Rights Commission of Pakistan that the complainant and other Muslim neighbours had beaten him severely to make them implicate Manzoor and Rehmat Masih. There appears to have been a history of petty clashes and hostility between the Christians and their Muslim neighbours.

In November 1993, Salamat Masih was released on bail, the two others were released in January 1994. On application of their lawyer, police protection was provided between the court and their lawyer's office. On 5 April 1994, on leaving their lawyer's office they were shot by

three assailants riding on a motor bike. Manzoor Masih died on the spot and the others were seriously injured. Salamat Masih, Rehmat Masih and John Joseph have since lived in hiding but their families and associates have received threats and there has been an arson attempt on the house of John Joseph.

#### **POINTS TO RAISE IN LETTERS TO GOVERNMENT**

- Condemn the death sentences passed on Salamat Masih, a child, and Rehmat Masih, both of whom are prisoners of conscience, and calling for their immediate and unconditional release;
- Urge the government to take urgent and effective measures to protect John Joseph and others involved in this case from attacks by Islamists;
- Call for, at the very least, the introduction of procedural changes to prevent innocent people from being charged under the blasphemy law.

#### **SELECTED ADDRESSES OF GOVERNMENT**

#### **Appendix 1**

1. President Farooq Leghari  
Office of the President  
Islamabad  
Pakistan

2. Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto  
Office of the Prime Minister  
Islamabad  
Pakistan

[Salutation: Dear President]

[Salutation: Dear Prime Minister]

**3. Mr Nabi Dad Khan**  
**Minister of Law**  
**Ministry of Law, Justice**  
**and Parliamentary Affairs**  
**Pakistan Secretariat**  
**Islamabad**  
**Pakistan**

[Salutation: Dear Minister]

**3. Maj. Gen. (Retd.) Nasirullah Khan**  
**Babar**  
**Minister of the Interior**  
**Pakistan Secretariat**  
**Islamabad**  
**Pakistan**

[Salutation: Dear Minister]

### **LIST OF PRESS IN PAKISTAN**

### **Appendix 2**

**Amn**  
**Akhbar Manzil**  
**Off I.I. Chundrigar Road**  
**Karachi**  
**Pakistan**

**Daily News**  
**Printing House**  
**I.I. Chundrigar Road**  
**Karachi**  
**Pakistan**

**The Nation**  
**Nipeo House**  
**4 Sharah-e-Fatima Jinnah**  
**POB 1815**  
**Lahore 54000**  
**Pakistan**

**Pakistan Times**  
**Rattan Chand Road**  
**GPOB 223**  
**Lahore**  
**Pakistan**

**The News**  
**Murree Road**  
**Rawalpindi**  
**Pakistan**

**Nawa-i-Waqt**  
**4 Sharah-e-Fatima Jinnah**  
**Lahore 54000**  
**Pakistan**

**Daily Jang**  
**HQ Printing House**  
**I.I. Chundrigar Road**  
**POB 52**  
**Karachi**  
**Pakistan**

**Dawn**  
**Haroon House**  
**Dr Ziauddin Ahmed Road**  
**Karachi 4**  
**Pakistan**

**Frontier Post**  
**32 Stadium Road**  
**Peshawar**  
**Pakistan**

**Newsline**  
**3/A Sand Haven**  
**FT 22/3**  
**Frere Town**  
**Karachi**  
**Pakistan**

**Imroze**  
**Rattan Chand Road**  
**Lahore 54000**  
**Pakistan**

**Herald**  
**Haroon House**  
**Dr Ziauddin Ahmed Road**  
**Karachi 4**  
**Pakistan**

**News Agencies**

**Associated Press of Pakistan (APP)  
House 1  
St.5, F-6/3,  
POB 1258  
Islamabad  
Pakistan**

**Pakistan Press International (PPI)  
Press Centre  
Shahrah Kamal Ataturk  
POB 541  
Karachi  
Pakistan**