

# URGENT ACTION

## MAN SENTENCED TO DEATH UNDER BLASPHEMY LAW

**Mohammad Asghar, a British man suffering from mental illness, has been sentenced to death under Pakistan's blasphemy laws. Masud Ahmad, another British man charged with blasphemy, has been granted bail but is still at risk of attack from extremists.**

In November 2012 **Masud Ahmad**, aged 72, a member of the Ahmaddiya religious community, was imprisoned in City District Jail in Lahore for reciting a passage from the Qu'ran, a prohibited act for Ahmadis under the country's blasphemy laws. The Ahmaddiya community are legally barred from calling themselves or their beliefs Muslim. Masud Ahmad was granted bail pending an appeal of his death sentence, but his life remains in danger as several individuals have been attacked and some even killed by other individuals or groups following blasphemy charges.

**Mohammad Asghar**, a shopkeeper aged 69, was arrested and sentenced to death under the blasphemy laws in Rawalpindi in 2010 after allegedly writing letters claiming he was a prophet. He suffered a stroke in 2000 and was later diagnosed by an expert psychiatrist in Scotland as suffering from paranoid schizophrenia and has had frequent episodes of delusions. Mohammad Asghar's lawyers maintain that it was never established that he posted the letters or even intended to post them. They also claim that the original content of the letters was never blasphemous and that a blasphemous line was inserted by the Complainant who was in possession of the letters for over a month before handing them over to police. Mohammad Asghar attempted suicide following his detention in 2010. He is currently appealing the death sentence at the Rawalpindi bench of the Lahore High Court. Mohammad Asghar's lawyers say they were denied access to him and in October 2013 the court ordered his lawyers be replaced by state lawyers. However, after persistent attempts, Mohammad Asghar's original lawyers were finally granted access to him on 23 and 25 January 2014. In addition, Mohammad Asghar is not being provided adequate medical care and his condition - both physical and mental - is very frail.

Blasphemy is punishable by death under Pakistani law, even though the offence does not meet the threshold of the "most serious crimes" for which the death penalty can be imposed under international law. International standards also state that the death penalty should not be imposed against people with mental illness.

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

- Calling on the Pakistani authorities to immediately and unconditionally drop the charges against Mohammad Asghar and Masud Ahmad;
- Urging them to guarantee the two men's safety and that of their families, expressing concern that several individuals have been attacked and some even killed following charges of blasphemy;
- Expressing concern that the current blasphemy laws violate the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, are used maliciously to settle personal disputes and target Muslims and religious minorities alike, and urging the government to amend or abolish the blasphemy laws to prevent this;
- Calling on them to respect international law and standards on the use of the death penalty, including the prohibition on the execution of persons with mental illness, and to commute all death sentences.

### PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 20 MARCH 2014 TO:

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

Chief Minister, Punjab  
Mian Mohammad Shahbaz Sharif  
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  
Room 305, S Block, Pakistan Secretariat  
Islamabad, Pakistan  
Fax: +92 51 921 0062  
Email: [contact@molaw.gov.pk](mailto:contact@molaw.gov.pk)

### Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country.

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation  
Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.

**AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL**



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### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

While purporting to protect Islam and the religious sensitivities of the Muslim majority, Pakistan's blasphemy laws have in fact fostered a climate of religiously motivated violence, leading to the persecution of religious minorities and Muslims alike. These laws are often used to make unfounded malicious accusations to settle personal scores in land and business disputes. The blasphemy laws are vaguely formulated and arbitrarily enforced by the police and judiciary in a way that amounts to harassment and persecution of both religious minorities and Muslims. People held in prison on blasphemy charges have been killed by fellow detainees or prison officials. Even outside prison, individuals accused of blasphemy have been killed by vigilante mobs.

"Defiling the name of the Prophet Mohammed" is a capital offence under Section 295-C of the Pakistan Penal Code, which states, "Whoever by words, either spoken or written or by visible representation, or by any imputation, innuendo, or insinuation, directly or indirectly, defiles the sacred name of the Holy Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him) shall be punished with death, or imprisonment for life, and shall also be liable to a fine". The Federal Shariat Court, whose tasks include reviewing laws to ensure they conform with Islamic doctrine, ruled in 1991 that anyone convicted of blasphemy should face the death penalty, not life imprisonment. It reaffirmed that ruling in a decision handed down in January 2014.

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, the expert body that oversees the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 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." Amnesty International opposes the death penalty unconditionally, in all cases and all countries, without exception, regardless of the crime for which the person was condemned or the execution method the state uses. The death penalty violates the right to life and is the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment.

Name: Masud Ahmad and Mohammad Asghar  
Gender m/f: m

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