

URGENT ACTION

AHMADIYYA COMMUNITY ATTACKED, THREE KILLED

A mob burned down the homes of a small Ahmadiyya community in Pakistan's Punjab province on 27 July, after a resident was accused of blasphemy. Two children and their grandmother died of smoke inhalation and several others were seriously injured.

On the evening of 27 July, a local Muslim man accused a man from the Ahmadiyya religious community in Gujranwala district of posting blasphemous content on his Facebook page. The Ahmadiyya are a small religious community who consider themselves Muslim, but are regarded as heretics by many Muslims in Pakistan and suffer frequent violent attacks and officially-sanctioned discrimination.

A group of Muslim residents went to the man's home and a scuffle broke out with some of the Ahmadi residents, during which the group was shot at. After two members of the group suffered gunshot wounds, a mob of over 100 people gathered outside the house and attacked it and other homes belonging to members of the local Ahmadiyya community. According to eyewitnesses, some members of the group set fire to houses. Many of the Ahmadi residents fled the scene, but some were too afraid to leave their homes. Bushara Bibi and her grandchildren, eight-month-old Kainat and seven-year-old Hira, both girls, died of smoke inhalation; a woman from the community suffered a miscarriage due to smoke inhalation.

The Ahmadiyya have accused the police of failing to protect them from the crowd, and the local ambulance service was unable to reach people stuck in their burning homes for fear of being attacked by the crowd. Law enforcement officials said over 100 people visited the local police station soon afterwards and demanded that the Ahmadi man accused of blasphemy be charged, while police said they planned to bring charges against 420 people, naming 20 of them, for their involvement in the attack on the Ahmadiyya community.

Ahmadis in Gujranwala are fearful of further attacks and say they have no confidence in the police's ability to bring the perpetrators to justice. Local police have registered a First Information Report, an important initial step in the criminal justice process in Pakistan, but no one is known to have been arrested for the violence or killings. Amnesty International has documented numerous instances in Pakistan of public pressure leading to blasphemy charges being brought against members of minority religious communities, resulting in further violence against them. The Pakistani authorities have a poor record of investigating such violence and prosecuting those responsible.

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

- Urging the authorities to investigate the 27 July attack on the Ahmadiyya community in Gujranwala, which led to the deaths of Hira, Kainat, and Bushara Bibi and bring those responsible to justice in fair trials without recourse to the death penalty;
- Calling on them to ensure no charges of blasphemy are brought against members of the Ahmadiyya community in Gujranwala or any other religious minority and guarantee the community's safety across all of Pakistan;
- Expressing concern that Pakistan's blasphemy laws violate the rights to freedom of thought, conscience and religion and freedom of expression, and are used maliciously to settle personal disputes, and urging the authorities to amend or abolish them.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 10 SEPTEMBER 2014 TO:

Prime Minister

Nawaz Sharif
Prime Minister House, Pakistan
Secretariat, Constitution Avenue,
Islamabad, Pakistan
Fax: +92 51 9220404
Email: pmmediaoffice@gmail.com
Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

Chief Minister, Punjab

Mian Mohammad Shahbaz Sharif
Chief Minister's Office
7, Club Road, GOR I
Lahore, Pakistan
Fax: +92 42 99204301
Twitter: <https://twitter.com/CMShehbaz>
Salutation: Dear Chief Minister Sharif

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

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

The Ahmadiyya are among the most persecuted religious communities in Pakistan. At least three Ahmadis have been killed in Pakistan this year already, two of them in Punjab. Dozens of other members of the community complain of facing routine harassment because of their religious beliefs. The Ahmadiyya are a small religious minority that consider themselves Muslim but are regarded as heretics by most Muslims in Pakistan. They were declared non-Muslims by a Constitutional Amendment in 1974. In the 1980s the Pakistani government made it a crime for the Ahmadiyya to publicly preach or claim they are Muslim, an offence carrying a maximum penalty of life imprisonment or death under the blasphemy laws.

Under Pakistan's blasphemy laws, "offences relating to religion" are a criminal offence with a maximum penalty of life imprisonment for defiling the Quran and death for derogatory remarks against the Prophet Muhammad. Those accused of blasphemy risk harassment and other abuse from private citizens and law enforcement officials.

Pakistan's blasphemy laws have fostered a climate of frequent religiously motivated violence, in which religious minorities and Muslims alike are targeted. These laws, which are formulated vaguely and arbitrarily enforced by the police and judiciary are often used to make unfounded malicious accusations to settle personal scores in land and business disputes. Pakistan has never executed anyone for the crime of blasphemy. However people held in prison on blasphemy charges have been killed by fellow detainees or prison officers. Even outside prison, people accused of blasphemy have been killed by vigilante mobs. High-level public officials who have spoken out against the blasphemy laws have themselves been assassinated.

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 blasphemy laws do not meet this threshold.

The UN Human Rights Committee, the expert body that oversees the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), 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 [ICCPR]," except in specific circumstances where individuals are advocating "national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence". 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: Ahmadiyya community

Gender m/f: both

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