

**EXTERNAL (for general distribution)**

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**UA 344/92 Prisoner of conscience/Unfair trial/Death Penalty**

**9 November 1992**

**PAKISTAN: Gul Masih**

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Gul Masih, a prisoner of conscience, has been sentenced to death in Sargoda, Punjab Province, after being tried for blasphemy against the Prophet Mohammad. Masih, a Christian, is the first person to be sentenced for "defiling" the name of the Prophet Mohammad since the death penalty became mandatory for this offence in mid-1991.

Amnesty International is concerned that Gul Masih has been detained and sentenced to death on account of his religious beliefs. The organization is urging the Government of Pakistan to release him immediately and unconditionally, and to ensure that all charges against him are dropped.

Gul Masih was arrested on 10 December 1991, a few days after he had refused to support a Muslim League candidate in local elections. Sajjad Hussain, a Muslim activist and a campaign worker for the Muslim League is reported to have quarrelled with Gul Masih and local Muslim clergy encouraged him to file a case of blasphemy against Gul Masih. Local human rights groups and Gul Masih maintain that the dispute did not involve any blasphemous reference to the Prophet Mohammad.

#### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

Charges of blasphemy have been used by Muslim activists in Pakistan against other religious minorities. Amnesty International knows of more than a dozen cases of alleged blasphemy pending before courts. Prisoners charged with blasphemy cannot be released on bail. Reports received by Amnesty International indicate that in all of these cases there has been a strong background of personal enmity on the part of the complainant against the member of the religious minority accused of blasphemy.

Amnesty International opposes any legislation under which people are held as prisoners of conscience on account of their political affiliation, religious beliefs, ethnic origin, sex, colour or language. In mid-1991 when the Pakistan Federal Cabinet decided to amend Section 295-C of the Pakistan Penal Code to make the death penalty mandatory for the offence of "defiling" the name of the Prophet Mohammad, Amnesty International expressed its concern that the amendment could be used against members of religious minorities for the exercise of their religious beliefs, and urged the Government of Pakistan to withdraw the amendment.

**RECOMMENDED ACTION: Please send telegrams/telexes/express and airmail letters either in English or in your own language:**

- expressing concern that Gul Masih has been falsely accused of blasphemy by a Muslim activist following a quarrel that did not involve any blasphemous reference to the Prophet Mohammad, and may not have received a fair trial;

- expressing concern that the law on blasphemy makes the death penalty mandatory, and expressing Amnesty International's opposition to the death penalty as a form of cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment;
- expressing concern that Gul Masih has been detained and sentenced to death on account of his religious beliefs;
- urging the government to release Gul Masih immediately and unconditionally.

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**APPEALS TO**

1) President Ghulam Ishaq Khan  
The Presidency  
Murree Brewery Road  
Rawalpindi  
Pakistan

**Salutation: Dear President**

**Telegrams: President, Rawalpindi, President's House, Pakistan**  
**Telexes: 54058 PSPUB PK**

2) Mian Nawaz Sharif  
Prime Minister,  
Minister of Foreign Affairs  
Office of the Prime Minister  
Islamabad  
Pakistan

**Salutation: Dear Prime Minister**

**Telegrams: Prime Minister, Islamabad, Pakistan**

3) Chaudhary Abdul Ghafoor  
Ministry of Law & Justice  
Pak Secretariat, Blocks R & S  
Islamabad  
Pakistan

**Salutation: Dear Minister**

**Telegrams: Minister Law and Justice, Islamabad, Pakistan**

4) Aziz A Munshi  
Attorney General  
Office of the Attorney General  
Islamabad  
Pakistan

**Salutation: Dear Attorney General**

**Telegrams: Attorney General, Islamabad, Pakistan**

**COPIES OF YOUR APPEALS TO:**

Mohammad Afzal Zullah  
Chief Justice  
Supreme Court  
Rawalpindi  
Pakistan

diplomatic representatives of Pakistan accredited to your country.

**PLEASE SEND APPEALS IMMEDIATELY.** Check with the International Secretariat, or your section office, if sending appeals after 21 December 1992.