



General Assembly

Distr.: General
XX May 2025

English only

Human Rights Council

Fifty-ninth session

16 June–11 July 2025

Agenda item 3

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by European Centre for Law and Justice, The / Centre Européen pour le droit, les Justice et les droits de l'homme, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[26 May 2025]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.

Requesting That Pakistan Release Christians Falsely Accused Of Blasphemy

1. INTRODUCTION

Pakistan is ranked as the 8th worst country for Christians, making it one of thirteen countries that have “extreme levels of persecution.”⁽¹⁾ Despite representing about two percent of Pakistan’s population, Christians account for roughly one fourth of blasphemy accusation targets in the country.⁽²⁾ Christian girls are often subject to forced religious conversions to Islam and forced marriages to Muslims.⁽³⁾ Religious extremists often gather in courtrooms to intimidate judges and pressure the courts to convict in the majority of blasphemy cases. This puts the burden to appropriately deliver justice on the higher courts while innocent victims spend years in jail. While Christians who are convicted on blasphemy charges sit in cells waiting for appeals, those who inflict “mob justice” are given considerable leniency by the courts, often not facing any penalty. The following information is largely based on firsthand knowledge from the European Centre for Law and Justice’s (ECLJ) affiliate office in Pakistan.

2. BACKGROUND

Mobs of religious extremists and fundamentalist Muslims in Pakistan regularly attack innocent Christians falsely accused of blasphemy. These mobs retaliate against police resistance and operate with impunity. Furthermore, Pakistan’s archaic blasphemy laws allow for anyone to be charged, tried, and convicted with little to no evidence, often carrying a death sentence if found guilty. Mobs often pack courtrooms to intimidate judges into deciding cases not on the merits but on threats of violence.

Pakistan has failed in its responsibility to provide due process of law and protection of fundamental rights, such as life and liberty, to its religious minorities. Article 7 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) states that “[a]ll are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.”⁽⁴⁾ Below are a few cases we request this Council highlight with Pakistan.

3. VIOLATIONS

Our affiliate’s client Ahsan Masih, a twenty-six-year-old Christian, was sentenced to death by an Anti-Terrorism Court in Pakistan in July 2024 over a false accusation of blasphemy. The allegation was that he posted evidence of another blasphemy case on social media. The evidence in question was a desecrated page of the Quran given to police in Jaranwala. The desecrated page led a mob of thousands to burn down over twenty churches and hundreds of Christian homes as the mob attacked the Christian community in Jaranwala.

Despite images of the desecrated page being circulated to thousands on social media, only one Christian man was arrested – Ahsan. Police accused him of reposting the desecrated page on TikTok.

Despite the best efforts of the attorneys associated with ECLJ’s affiliate in Pakistan during the trial, Ahsan was given an egregiously unjust sentence. Police officers, upon cross examination, admitted they had no evidence that Ahsan actually posted the picture. The forensic analysis of Ahsan’s phone found no evidence indicating that Ahsan was linked to the alleged post. Furthermore, Ahsan’s attorneys cited a case by the Lahore High Court, which held that, in order to convict, the prosecution must prove that the accused was the author and publisher of the alleged blasphemous material. Without giving any plausible reason, the Anti-Terrorism Court stated that these arguments were “devoid of any force,” and sentenced Ahsan to death by hanging.

Another case the ECLJ's affiliate has been working on involves Shahzad Masih, who was just sixteen years old when he was arrested in 2017 over false blasphemy charges. In 2022, he was sentenced to death even though the accusation did not constitute blasphemy under the law. The incident in question involved Shahzad's Muslim co-worker who asked Shahzad about Christian prophets. Shahzad told his co-worker that he had no answer, because he did not know much about religion. Shahzad also told his co-worker that his father's Muslim friend makes derogatory remarks when he hears anyone's name that has Muhammad in it.

A group of Muslim fundamentalist men were enraged by the conversation, and they handed Shahzad to the police, accusing him of blasphemy. The men then attended court hearings and threatened to kill Shahzad themselves if the court didn't punish him accordingly.⁽⁵⁾ Yielding to the threats, the trial court tried Shahzad as an adult, denied him due process, and sentenced him to death. ECLJ's affiliate filed an appeal with the High Court, which has been pending since November 2022, even though the UNWGAD has urged Pakistan "to immediately and unconditionally release him." An initial appeal hearing was set for May 2, 2024, but the case has been postponed four times without hearing arguments. Shahzad has spent almost seven years in prison because of an innocent conversation.

Two Christian brothers, Amoon Ayub and Qaiser Ayub, are involved in another case in which a mob has intimidated the courts. Like Shahzad, the Ayubs are on death row after being accused of blasphemy by a Muslim man who found a website containing blasphemous content as well as the Ayubs' names, address, and contact information. This alone was apparently sufficient to charge the brothers with blasphemy.

In December 2018, despite a lack of substantive evidence, the trial court convicted and sentenced the Ayubs to death by hanging. The court found the presence of the Ayubs' information sufficient to conclude that they created the blasphemous content. In June 2022, in a courtroom packed with Muslim fundamentalists and lawyers, the Lahore High Court's bench in Rawalpindi upheld the sentence. The Ayubs have now been in prison for about ten years, waiting for their appeal to be heard by the Supreme Court of Pakistan.

In another case the ECLJ's affiliate is representing a Christian man, Intizar Masih, who was accused of joining a WhatsApp chat group where people allegedly posted sacrilegious material. Intizar was charged with blasphemy and has been in prison since 2023. He was the only source of support for his wife, ten-year-old daughter, and eight-year-old son. Like the other victims mentioned in this report, Intizar remains in jail while his trial is ongoing.

More recently, Arsalan Gill, a twenty-four-year-old Christian man was accused of posting blasphemous content on Facebook.⁽⁶⁾ In March 2025, Arsalan was arrested after he was unknowingly added to two Facebook groups that shared blasphemous content.⁽⁷⁾ Arsalan, who works with his brother to support their family, did not know about the shared content.⁽⁸⁾ Groups like the one that ensnared Arsalan work to target people in false cases of online blasphemy.⁽⁹⁾ Called "blasphemy business groups" in Pakistan, these groups continue to operate today despite the High Court advising the Pakistani government in February 2025 to form an investigative commission.⁽¹⁰⁾ Arsalan, like others charged with blasphemy, faces the death penalty simply for being added to these groups.⁽¹¹⁾

In another recent case in January 2025, twenty-eight-year-old Farhan Masih, a Christian who suffers from mental illness, was arrested on charges of blasphemy for making statements against Islam.⁽¹²⁾ Farhan's mother tried to explain that Farhan's mental illness prevents him from understanding his words and forming the intent needed to be charged with blasphemy under Pakistani law, but Farhan was arrested and charged anyway.⁽¹³⁾ Police were so concerned about possible mob violence from extremists that, since the arrest, officers were dispatched to protect Farhan, his family, and their Christian neighborhood.⁽¹⁴⁾

4. REQUEST

From these few cases, it is apparent that there is an urgent need for Pakistan to do a better job of providing due process of law for all its citizens, including religious minorities. The blasphemy laws in Pakistan have been used by religious extremists as a weapon to target and persecute religious minorities in the country. For any chance of true justice to be possible, the Pakistani judiciary must be freed from the threat and intimidation by mobs and violent religious extremists. The legal system must be impartial. We also request that Pakistan repeal the blasphemy laws. In the meantime, we request that Pakistan expedite the hearings of blasphemy cases, decide them on the merits without succumbing to mob pressure, and release people who are falsely accused of committing blasphemy against Islam.

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- (1) World Watch List 2025, OPEN DOORS.
 - (2) Pakistan, OPEN DOORS.
 - (3) World Watch List 2025 Pakistan, OPEN DOORS.
 - (4) G.A. Res. 217 (III) A, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, art. 7 (Dec. 10, 1948).
 - (5) Saqib Jalali of Tahreek e Tahafuz e Islam Threatens to Kill Christian Man Accused of Blasphemy, YOUTUBE, July 15, 2017.
 - (6) Christian in Pakistan Charged with Blasphemy for Facebook Post, MORNING STAR NEWS (Mar. 25, 2025).
 - (7) Id.
 - (8) Id.
 - (9) Id.
 - (10) Inquiry ordered into blasphemy entrapment group in Pakistan, CHRISTIAN DAILY INT'L, (Feb. 12, 2025).
 - (11) Christian in Pakistan Charged with Blasphemy for Facebook Post, supra note 6.
 - (12) Mentally Challenged Christian in Pakistan Charged with Blasphemy, CHRISTIAN DAILY INT'L (Jan. 29, 2025).
 - (13) Id.
 - (14) Mentally Ill Christian Man Accused of “Blasphemy” in Pakistan, BARNABASAID (Feb. 6, 2025).