



Jay Alan Sekulow, J.D., Ph.D.
Chief Counsel

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HE Jalil Abbas Jilani
Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan
to the United States of America
Embassy of Pakistan



RE: Urgent Update Concerning Asia Bibi's Delayed Hearing

Your Excellency:

We recently sent you a letter regarding Asia Bibi – the Christian mother of five currently on death row in Pakistan – that addressed the immediate need for her release. At the time of that correspondence, the Supreme Court of Pakistan was just days away from hearing a final appeal of Asia's death sentence.

A three-justice panel at Pakistan's Supreme Court was scheduled to hear Asia's appeal on October 13, 2016. The day of the hearing, however, one of the justices, Iqbal Hameed ur Rehman, recused himself, citing a conflict of interest. Justice Rehman was the Chief Justice of the Islamabad High Court when the High Court upheld the conviction of Mumtaz Qadri, the bodyguard who shot and killed Governor Salmaan Taseer because of Salmaan's support of Asia Bibi. As Justice Rehman did not serve on the panel that upheld Qadri's conviction, this appears to be nothing more than a delay tactic.

This further delay in Asia's case is unacceptable. As we stated before, Asia's arrest, imprisonment, and death sentence violate international agreements Pakistan has ratified without reservations.¹ Asia has already spent **seven years** in prison waiting for the final outcome of her case. Now the Supreme Court has *further delayed* her case. This is utterly unconscionable in light of the well-known fact that most blasphemy cases are based on false accusations, followed by faulty investigations and trials full of errors. This is precisely what happened in Asia's case.

¹Universal Declaration of Human Rights, G.A. Res. 217A (III), U.N. Doc A/810, at 18 (1948); International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, G.A. Res. 2200A (XXI), U.N. GAOR, 21st Sess., Supp. No. 16, U.N. Doc. A/6316 (Dec. 16, 1966) [hereinafter "ICCPR"].

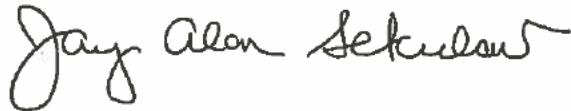


Article 10-A of the Constitution of Pakistan requires that a person facing a criminal charge “shall be entitled to a fair trial and due process.” Asia’s trial was anything but fair, and the process she has experienced and is experiencing *even to this very day* is anything but due process. Moreover, international legal norms recognize the impropriety of undue delay in criminal cases.² The undue delay in Asia’s case must stop now.

Your Excellency, we again specifically request that you use your esteemed office to advocate for Asia’s freedom and to ensure that Pakistan honor its international legal obligations, as well as its own laws.

Again, on behalf of the increasing number of concerned individuals, currently at over 538,000 from 206 nations and territories around the world, we urge your serious consideration of this absolutely critical matter.

Respectfully submitted,



Jay Alan Sekulow
Chief Counsel



Robert W. Ash
Senior Counsel

²See e.g. ICCPR, at art. 14.