

Pakistan: A Christian couple's legs broken, and burnt alive on fabricated charges of blasphemy by a Kiln Owner

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ASIAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION — URGENT APPEALS PROGRAMME

Urgent Appeal Case: AHRC-UAC-147-2014

November 5, 2014

A Christian couple's legs broken, and burnt alive on fabricated charges of blasphemy by a Kiln Owner

ISSUES: Blasphemy law, religious minorities, Torture, illegal confinement,

Dear friends,

The Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) has received information about a horrifying incident of a Christian couple being burnt alive on charges of Blasphemy in Pakistan's Punjab Province. According to information, the couples' legs have been broken so that they cannot escape the burning. The young Christian couple has been severely beaten and were both thrown into burning kiln by an enraged mob of about 2000 to 3000. This large mob had been instigated by the owner of a kiln in Kasur District in the Punjab Province, where the Provincial Government permits any person, especially organized mobs to do as they please, with impunity to those religious minorities such as Christians, Ahmadi's etc. This incident too has taken place with full police presence and connivance.

The incident had taken place at the time the couple had met the kiln owner to demand arrears in payments due to them - dues that amounted to about Rupees 500,000 for work done for over a period of several months. The kiln owner had charged them instead with blasphemy and instigated the mobs to break their legs and burn them alive, on allegations that the couple burnt pages from the Holy Quran.

CASE NARRATIVE:

According to the information received from the Women In Struggle for Empowerment (WISE), Life for All Pakistanis, and other media sources, on 4th November 2014, a Christian couple, Mr. Shahzad Masih, 32 years of age and his wife Mrs. Shama of 30 years, had requested that they be paid monies

due to them amounting to about Pakistan Rupees 500,000 from Mr. Yousuf Gujjar, a Kiln owner in the area. A couple of days earlier on 2nd November 2014, the couple who worked in the clay-baking factory, were kidnapped and held hostage for two days inside the factory premise. On 4th 4 November morning at around 7.00 a.m. the couple had been dragged out by the mobs, beaten till their legs were broken and then shoved into the brick kiln. Reports revealed that the Shama, was pregnant at the time.

The couple had been agitating for months, and had wanted to leave the Kiln taking with them their three young children since the Kiln Owner Yousuf Gujjar was not paying their wages. He had in turn demanded Pakistan Rupees 500,000 from the couple if they want to quit their jobs at the kiln.

According to Sardar Mushtaq Gill, a lawyer and human rights defender who visited the scene of the crime, the alleged charges of blasphemy was laid upon them due to an incident following the death of Shahzad's father a few days earlier. Shama while cleaning her father-in-law's house, had burnt some personal belongings which included papers, books, etc.. A Muslim man, a passerby seeing Shama disposing of the papers, etc, had spread the word in the village that she was burning pages of the Holy Quran. Upon this instigation a mob of around 100 enraged people had attacked the couple and taken them hostage which ended in them being executed on the 4th November 2014.

Sarfraz, a cousin of the Shahzad, has stated that "Two days ago, after an exchange of words with Yousuf, the owner of the kiln, he had locked the couple along with their children in a room,". After two local Mosques announced the alleged blasphemy, "a large number of Muslims led by area clerics reached the kiln and dragged the couple out of the room after forcibly breaking in. The mob had first tortured them, broken their legs and then thrown them in the kiln.

According to the information received, as the Christian couple were pleading and protesting their innocence, the mob was shouting "Allah hu Akbar," (Allah is great) "death to blasphemers," and "kill the infidel Christians". Hearing these cries, Christian residents living nearby, had fled from their homes in fear of their lives. Media reports claim that it was the kiln owner who had instigated the nearby locality and Mosque leaders calling on them to punish the couple for blasphemy. The Mosque leaders used loudspeakers to call to the mob to gather and punish the alleged blasphemers. It is also reported that before throwing the couple in the furnace, the mob had also broken their legs so that they could not be able to run away.

On the day of incident the kiln owner detained them in a room for allegedly desecrating the Holy Quran and had gathered the villagers and informed them about the alleged desecration of the Holy Quran. An activists who had visited the site, following the incident had said that only a few bones and hair were found at the site. Reports also revealed that around two dozen police officers were present and did nothing to stop this heinous crime. A report published in Pakistan Today said that the couple had three children and Ms. Shama was pregnant with her fourth child.

According to activists and rights based organisations the owner of the kiln had been involved in creating a hostile environment against the Christian couple for some time since the couple were demanding their dues, and these demands were drawing the attention of other workers to the sheer lack of any labour rights in the factory. The kiln owner had even appointed several of his supporters to watch the activities of the couple for some time so that they can be punished on any blasphemy charges.

The District police are now in attempts to shift the blame of the killing the couple to the local people in an effort to save the skin of the brick kiln owner - who has close contacts with the police officers of the District. The District Police Officer (DPO) Kasur, Jawad Qamar said that it was Muhammad Irfan a worker at the kiln who spread the news of the couple burning the pages of the Quran and

that the informant should be punished for the instigation of the mob – that eventually killed the couple.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Pakistan's brick kiln workers are highly discriminated and a vulnerable community; mostly debt bonded and often subject to harsh practices, and work in slave like conditions at these kilns. There are estimated 4.5 million bonded brick kiln labourers in Pakistan.

Blasphemy is a hugely sensitive issue in Muslim dominated Pakistan, with even unproven allegations often prompting mob violence. Anyone convicted, or even just accused, of insulting Islam, risks a violent and bloody death at the hands of fanatics and unruly mobs.

A Christian woman Asia Bibi has been on death row since November 2010 after she was found guilty of making derogatory remarks about Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) during an argument with a Muslim woman.

Minorities are particularly impacted by the blasphemy law. Firstly, they are disproportionately targeted as compared to their actual representation in the population. Secondly, when any one of them is accused, the entire community is made to suffer, as illustrated by the mob violence. In fact, the desire to grab land or settle personal scores often underlies blasphemy allegations.

According to the Daily Dawn, an estimated number of 1,274 people have been charged under the stringent blasphemy laws of Pakistan between 1986, from when they were included in the Constitution by General Zia ul Haq, in 2010.

Pakistan's Penal Code Section dates back to pre-partition India when it was introduced in 1860. Section 295, better known as the Blasphemy Law, deals with religious offences and was meant to prevent religious violence. Prior to 1986, only 14 cases pertaining to blasphemy were reported.

The blasphemy laws include a death penalty for the defamation of the Holy Prophet and life imprisonment for the desecration of the Holy Quran.

According to sources, 51 people accused of blasphemy were murdered before their respective trials were over.

SUGGESTED ACTION:

Please write the letters to the authorities calling them to initiate immediate inquiry in to the killing of two innocent Christians, (the husband and wife) on the fictitious charges of Blasphemy. The government of Pakistan must abolish the Blasphemy law particularly its clause B and C which are grossly misused with the motive to punish the people from religious minority groups. Please urge them to immediately arrest Yousuf Gujjar, the owner of the kiln, Mr. Javed Qamar, the District Police Officer of Kasur, Punjab, the Mosque leaders of the Koy Radha Kishan in the Kasur District on the charges of murder and lynching. The government of Punjab must protect and provide the best possible care to the children of the deceased couple.

The AHRC will write a separate letter to the UN Special Rapporteur on the Question of Religious minorities calling for his intervention into this matter.

To support this appeal, please click here:

<http://www.urgentappeals.net/support.php?ua=AHRC-UAC-147-2014>

SAMPLE LETTER:

Dear,

PAKISTAN: A Christian couple's legs broken, and burnt alive on fabricated charges of blasphemy by a Kiln Owner

Name of victim:

1. Mr. Shahzad Masih 32, resident of Chak 59, a village near Kot Radha Kishan in Kasur District, Punjab

2. Mrs Shama 30 wife of Shahzad Masih, resident of Chak 59, a village near Kot Radha Kishan in Kasur District, Punjab

Names of alleged perpetrators:

Mr. Yousuf Gujjar, owner of the brick kiln, Chak 59, a village near Kot Radha Kishan in Kasur District, Punjab

Mr. Jawad Qamar the District Police Officer (DPO) Kasur, Punjab,

Date of incident: Kot Radha Kishan, Kasur District, Punjab

Place of incident: November 4, 2014

I am writing to voice my deep concern regarding the barbaric and utterly horrifying incident of beating and burning alive of a Christian Couple on fictitious charges of Blasphemy. The government's appeasement towards the religious leaders and failure to control the misuse of Blasphemy is creating a violent atmosphere in the country particularly in Punjab province which is compelling the members of religious minority groups to flee the country.

It is very shocking to me that in this incident not only the Mosque leaders and loudspeakers were used to punish the alleged blasphemers but also the police. The police are also becoming a part of Muslim fanaticism to taking sides with the extremist groups in Pakistan.

According to the information that I have received from the Women In Struggle for Empowerment (WISE), Life for All Pakistanis, and other media sources, on 4th November 2014, a Christian couple, Mr. Shahzad Masih, 32 years of age and his wife Mrs. Shama of 30 years, had requested that they be paid monies due to them amounting to about Pakistan Rupees 500,000 from Mr. Yousuf Gujjar, a Kiln owner in the area. A couple of days earlier on 2nd November 2014, the couple who worked in the clay-baking factory, were kidnapped and held hostage for two days inside the factory premise. On 4th 4 November morning at around 7.00 a.m. the couple had been dragged out by the mobs, beaten till their legs were broken and then shoved into the brick kiln. Reports revealed that the Shama, was pregnant at the time.

The couple had been agitating for months, and had wanted to leave the Kiln taking with them their four young children since the Kiln Owner Yousuf Gujjar was not paying their wages. He had in turn demanded Pakistan Rupees 500,000 from the couple if they want to quit their jobs at the kiln.

According to Sardar Mushtaq Gill, a lawyer and human rights defender who visited the scene of the crime, the alleged charges of blasphemy was laid upon them due to an incident following the death of Shahzad's father a few days earlier. Shama while cleaning her father-in-law's house, had burnt some personal belongings which included papers, books, etc.. A Muslim man, a passerby seeing Shama disposing of the papers, etc., had spread the word in the village that she was burning pages of the Holy Quran. Upon this instigation a mob of around 100 enraged people had attacked the couple and taken them hostage which ended in them being executed on the 4th November 2014.

Sarfraz, a cousin of the Shahzad, has stated that "Two days ago, after an exchange of words with Yousuf, the owner of the kiln, he had locked the couple along with their children in a room,". After two local Mosques announced the alleged blasphemy, "a large number of Muslims led by area clerics reached the kiln and dragged the couple out of the room after forcibly breaking in. The mob had first tortured them, broken their legs and then thrown them in the kiln.

As the Christian couple were pleading and protesting their innocence, the mob was shouting "Allah hu Akbar," (Allah is great) "death to blasphemers," and "kill the infidel Christians". Hearing these cries, Christian residents living nearby, had fled from their homes in fear of their lives. Media reports claim that it was the kiln owner who had instigated the nearby locality and Mosque leaders calling on them to punish the couple for blasphemy. The Mosque leaders used loudspeakers to call to the mob to gather and punish the alleged blasphemers. It is also reported that before throwing the couple in the furnace, the mob had also broken their legs so that they could not be able to run away.

On the day of incident the kiln owner detained them in a room for allegedly desecrating the Holy Quran and had gathered the villagers and informed them about the alleged desecration of the Holy Quran. An activists who had visited the site, following the incident had said that only a few bones and hair were found at the site. Reports also revealed that around two dozen police officers were present and did nothing to stop this heinous crime. A report published in Pakistan Today said that the couple had three children and Ms. Shama was pregnant with her fourth child.

According to activists and rights based organisations the owner of the kiln had been involved in creating a hostile environment against the Christian couple for some time since the couple were demanding their dues, and these demands were drawing the attention of other workers to the sheer lack of any labour rights in the factory. The kiln owner had even appointed several of his supporters to watch the activities of the couple for some time so that they can be punished on any blasphemy charges.

The District police are now in attempts to shift the blame of the killing the couple to the local people in an effort to save the skin of the brick kiln owner - who has close contacts with the police officers of the District. The District Police Officer (DPO) Kasur, Jawad Qamar said that it was Muhammad Irfan a worker at the kiln who spread the news of the couple burning the pages of the Quran and that the informant should be punished for the instigation of the mob - that eventually killed the couple.

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A Christian woman Asia Bibi has been on death row since November 2010 after she was found guilty

of making derogatory remarks about Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) during an argument with a Muslim woman.

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The blasphemy laws include a death penalty for the defamation of the Holy Prophet and life imprisonment for the desecration of the Holy Quran.

According to sources, 51 people accused of blasphemy were murdered before their respective trials were over.

In view of the above, I call on your good offices to initiate an immediate inquiry in to the killing of the two innocent Christians, (the husband and wife) on the fictitious charges of Blasphemy. The government of Pakistan must abolish the Blasphemy law particularly its clause B and C which are grossly misused with the motive to punish the people from religious minority groups. I also earnestly urge you to immediately arrest Yousuf Gujjar, the owner of the kiln, Mr. Javed Qamar, the District Police Officer of Kasur, Punjab, the Mosque leaders of the Koy Radha Kishan in the Kasur District on the charges of abetting murder. I also call upon you to make arrangements to protect and provide the best possible care to the children of the deceased couple.

Yours sincerely,

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PLEASE SEND YOUR LETTERS TO:

1.Mr. Mamnoon Hussain
President of Pakistan
President's Secretariat
Islamabad
PAKISTAN
Fax: +92 51 9207458
Email: publicmail president.gov.pk

2. Mr. Mian Nawaz Sharif
Prime Minister
Prime Minister House
Islamabad
PAKISTAN
Fax: +92 51 922 1596
E-mail: secretary cabinet.gov.pk or pspm pmsectt.gov.pk

3. Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan
Federal Minister for Interior
R Block, Pak Secretariat
Islamabad
PAKISTAN
Fax: +92 51 9202624
Email: interior.complaintcell gmail.com or ministry.interior gmail.com

4. Mr. Shahbaz Sharif
Chief Minister
Government of Punjab Province
Chief Minister's Secretariat
5-Club Road, GOR-I, Lahore, Punjab
PAKISTAN
Fax: +92 42 99205065
Email: cmcomplaintcell cmpunjab.gov.pk

5. Mr. Pervez Rashid
Federal Minister
Ministry of Law, Justice and Human Rights
4th Floor, Cabinet Block,
Pak. Secretariat,
Islamabad, Pakistan.
Fax:92-51-9206399

Email: webmaster infopak.gov.pk, OR contact molaw.gov.pk

6. Mr. Justice Tahir Shahbaz
Registrar of the Supreme Court of Pakistan
Constitution Avenue, Islamabad
PAKISTAN
Fax: +92 51 9213452
Email: mail supremecourt.gov.pk

[Blue button only present in e-mail contact list]

Thank you.

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P.S.

* <http://www.humanrights.asia/news/urgent-appeals/AHRC-UAC-147-2014>