

Pakistan: Call to release a lecturer Junaid Hafeez facing Blasphemy charges for five years without trial

Sunday 29 December 2019, by [IHRC-HK](#), [Petition / Sign-on Letter](#) (Date first published: 29 December 2019).

International Human Rights Commission (IHRC-HK) appeal to the government of Pakistan to immediately release Mr. Junaid Hafeez who is languishing in Multan, Punjab, prison for more than five years on the baseless charges of blasphemy. His case is a typical example of miscarriage of justice where lawyer's community and in charge judge have very biased opinion about the case of Blasphemy and often presiding judge takes the side of the fundamentalists.

According to the information received from International Human Rights Council Mr. Junaid Hafeez has been denied of fair trial since his arrest from March 2013. He bid farewell to studying medicine at the King Edward Medical College after his first year of MBBS and entered Bahauddin Zakaria University (BZU) to pursue a degree in English literature. Hafeez was one of five Pakistani students to be selected under the Fulbright Scholarship Programme to complete their Masters from the United States. He proceeded to Jackson State University, where he studied American literature, photography and theatre. Mr. Hafeez later came back to serve his country and was appointed as a lecturer of English at Bahauddin Zakaria University, Multan, Punjab. (Dawn)

Hafeez, was arrested after a criminal case was registered accusing him of blasphemy. The charge is based on alleged comments posted on Facebook, which Hafeez denies. He has been in solitary confinement since his arrest.

Given the sensitive nature of the crime, Hafeez's trial was conducted inside the prison. The group of agitating lawyers have threatened the presiding judge that if Hafeez is not awarded death sentence the judge himself will not be spared.

The police and prosecution have never found any evidence that Mr. Hafeez has ever committed blasphemy in his writing or lectures. One of the witnesses later produced by the prosecution to testify against Junaid reiterated the same accusations that were levelled at them back in BZU. Hafeez Junaid's lawyer brought his books to court and asked the witness to pinpoint the blasphemous content to the judge. The prime witness says he could neither read nor understand English. When the Multan police registered a case against Junaid; they did so based on some printouts of offensive material attributed to Junaid, which the defence attorney believes was doctored. Junaid was arrested from Lahore and brought back to Multan.

It is appalling for IHRC-HK that during the trials a group of lawyers, subscribing to fundamentalist interpretation of Islam, first attacked and threatened the defending lawyer to recuse himself from defending the case otherwise he will be killed.

Another lawyer, Rashid Rehman, a prominent human rights defender, was attacked and murdered inside his office . Before his killing he was threatened before the judge that if defending lawyer comes again for defending the accused, he will be killed. The judge did not stop group of lawyers he didn't even took any action against them, instead he was reported to be smiling. Mr. Rashid Rehman, was murdered on May 7, 2014.

Later human rights activists arranged a third lawyer to defend the lecturer, who has to travel on every hearing about 200 kilometers from Lahore to Multan and often he faces hindrances at the trial court for example the prosecutor is absent or judge is not available.

IHRC-HK is very disappointed by the attitude of the judiciary which goes out its way to appease the religious militants. The family members of the victim have written letters to the higher judiciary requesting them to provide justice to him; however, judiciary remained afraid of the religious groups and did not interfere in the matter.

The IHRC-HK, therefore, appeal you to take immediate action into the case of Mr. Junaid Hafeez, a lecturer of Bahauddin Zakaria University, Multan, who is languishing in a prison for more than five years where the wardens and prisoners all are threatening him with dire consequences. Mr. Hafeez must be secured as it is often the norm Pakistani prisons prisoners are killed inside jail premises to avoid the legal procedures and also to satisfy the religious groups.

I also appeal the authorities and chief justice of Pakistan to release Hafeez immediately and to protect his life. Particularly since the volatile situation of law and order in the country following the acquittal of Asia Bibi, it becomes even more pertinent to provide security to him.

I hope you will immediately release him and prosecute all of those who have accused him of baseless charges of Blasphemy.

Thank You.

International Human Rights Council HK

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P.S.

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