

**Call to input into report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of religion or belief to the 55th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council.**

**A submission by CSW (Christian Solidarity Worldwide)**

**Introduction**

1. CSW is a human rights organisation specialising in the right to freedom of religion or belief for all (FoRB). This submission focuses on Pakistan, where the dissemination of hatred continues, fueling and fuelled by intolerance, discrimination, and violence based on religion or belief.
2. Pakistan is an Islamic republic, but the constitution guarantees FoRB for all - and specifically protects religious minorities in accordance with the United Nations (UN) Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). Despite this, the FoRB situation in the country is dire. Several factors combine to create an atmosphere of tension and fear, where the country is continually on high alert as terrorist attacks and other acts of violence become increasingly commonplace.

**Legal framework**

3. Pakistan's blasphemy laws criminalise anyone who insults Islam under Section 295 (A-C) of the Pakistan Penal Code, including by outraging religious feeling, defiling the Qur'an, and defiling the name of the Prophet Mohammed, which carries the death penalty or life imprisonment.
4. On 7 August Pakistan's Senate passed the Criminal Laws (Amendment) Act 2023 which makes the blasphemy laws more stringent by increasing the punishment for insulting the Prophet Mohammed's companions, wives, and family members from three years to life imprisonment, not to be less than ten years.
5. Not only are these laws incompatible with Pakistan's national and international legal commitments to the right to FoRB, they are further misused to settle personal scores or business disputes against Muslims of other sects and non-Muslims. From 1987 to 2022, over 700 Muslims and 200 Christians were accused of blasphemy and the consequences are often tragic, with violence being meted out by extremist vigilante mobs against the victim and their family. Zohra Yusuf of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan says, 'Anyone even accused of blasphemy practically carries a death sentence even if they are released.'
6. As of 23 September 2023, the Lahore-based non-governmental organisation (NGO) Centre for Social Justice - one of CSW's local partners in Pakistan - had recorded 236 blasphemy cases in 2023 and reported that seven people have been extra-judicially killed in relation to blasphemy accusations.
7. The Ahmadiyya community is the most widely institutionally and constitutionally persecuted religious

group in Pakistan. In 1974 the government introduced a constitutional amendment which made Pakistan the only country in the world to declare Ahmadis to be non-Muslims by law. This was further exacerbated a decade later, when in 1984 the introduction of Ordinance XX made it a criminal offence for Ahmadis to call themselves Muslims.

8. These are clear examples of the advocacy of hatred being defined in Pakistan's legal and policy frameworks.

**Government Endorsement of Hate Speech**

9. Some government officials are themselves responsible for hate speech, as are extremist elements who have been afforded legitimacy and impunity by officials who have pledged to appease or work with such groups.
10. On 16 June 2023 the government struck an agreement declaring that the far-right group Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) was a political party and not a terrorist organisation despite the group having been proscribed as such under Pakistan's Anti-Terrorism Act since 2021. The TLP is known for organising violent protests against proposed changes to the blasphemy laws, and in 2018 its founder and then-chief Khadim Hussain Rizvi was quoted as saying 'The Chief Justice and two others deserve to be killed' following the Supreme Court acquittal of Asia Bibi, a Christian mother of four who spent eight years on death row after she was convicted of blasphemy.

**Education**

11. Primary and secondary education in Pakistan teach prejudicial attitudes.
12. In July 2020 the then-government announced the creation of a Single National Curriculum (SNC) to replace the 2006 school curriculum. To pacify religious madrassahs, the government leaned heavily on the advice of conservative Islamic clerics, resulting in a strong Islamic influence across subjects.
13. While non-Muslim students have been given the option to study Ethics in lieu of the usual mandatory Islamic Studies in schools, textbooks for this subject are authored with an Islamic bias, which continues to violate the fundamental rights of non-Muslims under the constitution of Pakistan. Article 22 of the Pakistani Constitution asserts that 'No person attending any education institution shall be required to receive religious instruction, or take part in any religious ceremony, or attend religious worship, if such instruction, ceremony or worship relates to a religion other than his own.'
14. The SNC proposed that non-Muslim students will be able to study their own religion, but the resources have still not been prepared, published or issued to schools to teach. Furthermore, there are complications on how this will practically be implemented, especially when there may only be as many as one or two non-Muslim students in a particular class. There are challenges of

acquiring teachers to teach such few students and a lack of resources for smaller and public schools to undertake such an initiative remains an obstacle.

15. To teach these new classes, public schools will almost certainly be required to hire specialist madrassah graduates to teach the new Qur'an classes. Some have warned that this will likely exacerbate sectarianism in schools, as madrassah education is viewed as sectarian by design.
16. The government's response to complaints from the parents of religious minority children has been to tell all non-Muslim students to leave the class during the lessons in question. This proposal isolates religious minority children from their Muslim counterparts, and, if enacted, could see students missing out on up to half their education in some classes without alternative provisions, jeopardising their academic attainment and chances for further study.
17. The syllabus elsewhere is replete with derogatory content and language about religious minorities, who are portrayed as inferior or second-class citizens, while Muslim students who memorise the Qur'an get 20 extra marks towards admission applications for higher education, employment and professional studies.
18. In addition, teachers and non-minority students often have discriminatory attitudes and attempt to forcibly convert students from minority faiths.
19. Non-Muslims are considered second-class citizens with lesser rights and privileges, their patriotism is called into question and their contribution to society is ignored. They are routinely subjected to severe physical and psychological ill-treatment including being segregated, bullied, teased and beaten on multiple occasions by both teachers and other students.

### Jaranwala, August 2023

20. On 16 August 2023 a violent mob of hundreds stormed a Christian colony in Jaranwala town of Faisalabad district, ransacking and torching around 21 churches, attacking the residences of the Christian community and the office of the local assistant commissioner. As per the FIR registered by the police and local sources, the violence erupted after some locals alleged that several desecrated pages of religious scriptures along with the handwritten note had been found near a house at Cinema Chowk in Jaranwala, where two Christian brothers resided and were accused of the desecration.
21. The mob set ablaze churches, Bibles, and other sacred books and furniture and looted valuables from the houses of Christians. The residents had to flee, leaving their homes and belongings. Government figures of houses burnt are around 80, but civil society organisations estimates are higher, between 150-200 homes. Videos and messages on social media posted by local residents show that the mobs were stirred up by broadcasts over local mosque loudspeakers. This is a recurring theme in blasphemy law violations in Pakistan – mosque loudspeakers are regularly used to decry the offenders and call for mobs to exact justice themselves. Mobs were also seen raising slogans in favour of extremist organisations such as the Tehreek-e-Labbaik.
22. The two accused were named as Raja and Rocky Masih and have been charged with insulting Islam under Section 295-B of the Pakistani Penal Code and defiling the name of the Prophet Mohammed, under Section 295-C. The trial is ongoing.
23. While a heavy contingent of police reached the area and assured the growing mob that the suspects would be apprehended and would face action under the law, videos showed the charged crowds proceeding to attack the colony, demanding to execute the two men themselves.
24. Local residents expressed their belief to CSW that had the police acted in time, the situation would not have escalated. The police initially blamed the Indian spy agency RAW for being behind the attack, giving statements to the national broadcaster Dunya news stating that 'concrete evidence' had been found that demonstrated it was an Indian attempt to divide Pakistani groups. Later, however, they claimed it had simply been the result of a personal dispute between Rocky and Raja, still deflecting blame for their own failure to control the mob. Regardless of who is to blame for the dispute itself, there is a clear failure of the state to implement and enforce the rule of law when it comes to blasphemy cases.
25. Following the incident, organisation Bytes 4 all (B4A)<sup>1</sup> initiated monitoring of social media platforms to collect data related to the event. Preliminary findings indicate that individuals are using Twitter and Facebook accounts to fuel the violence. Subsequently, this incitement spread to other platforms, including YouTube, TikTok, and Snake Video.

### Ahmadiyya Muslims

26. The Ahmadi community is often particularly targeted with hate speech. In multiple instances, Islamic teachers – mullahs – have advocated hate, announcing over mosque loudspeakers that anyone who kills an Ahmadi will go to paradise, and anyone who loots their houses will be blessed with money.
27. In 2019, Pakistan's Parliamentary Affairs Minister Azam Swati claimed in a television interview that he and Prime Minister Imran Khan sent curses towards the Ahmadi community, referring to them as Qadianiyat – a religious slur.
28. In April 2020 Pakistan's State Minister for Parliamentary Affairs, Ali Muhammad Khan issued a tweet (which has

<sup>1</sup> Bytes for All, <https://www.bytesforall.pk/publications>

since been deleted) which endorsed beheading as an acceptable punishment for blasphemers, who he went on to make clear referred to members of the Ahmadiyya community. The UK All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for the Ahmadiyya community reported that the minister's tweet subsequently resulted in 'a tirade of abuse and hate speech against Ahmadi Muslims' which culminated in the arrest of two members of the community on blasphemy charges.

29. Such rhetoric has likely encouraged the murder of several prominent Ahmadis in recent years, including that of Professor Naeemuddin Khattak, who was shot dead by two unidentified men on a motorcycle in Peshawar on 5 October 2020, and Dr Tahir Mahmood, who was killed in front of his family at his home in Murch Balochan, Nankana Sahib District, Punjab on 20 November 2020.

## Further Cases of Advocacy of Hatred

### Elections

30. Hatred is often more pronounced during election cycles. In July 2018 the campaign rhetoric of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, led by Imran Khan at the time, was criticised when Khan spoke at a rally of Muslim leaders on saying he would defend Section 295(C) of the blasphemy laws. The PTI eventually claimed victory in the elections.
31. During the same campaign, groups involved in terrorist activities and spreading intolerance against minorities were given a legitimate platform to participate in the elections, calling into question the state's anti-terrorism activities. One such banned group, Ahle-Sunnat Wal Jamaat (ASWJ), had over 150 candidates running in the elections. The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) included some 925 extremist-linked candidates in the final candidate list.
32. The elections themselves were mired by violence targeting political parties, party leaders and candidates; accusations of voter rigging; severe media suppression; allegations of interference in the electoral process by the military-led establishment, and the role the judiciary played as a political actor mainly through its special suo moto jurisdiction of the military.

### Religious festivals

33. Members of religious minority groups are often more visible and therefore more vulnerable during the celebration of festivals linked to their religion or belief. For example, on Easter Sunday in March 2016 a suicide bombing at the Gulshan-e-Iqbal Park in Lahore killed at least 72 people and injured around 300. The Jamaat-ul Ahrar Islamist group – a faction of the Pakistani Taliban – claimed responsibility and announced that this was a deliberate attack against Christians, with more to follow.
34. On 17 December 2017 two suicide bombers attacked a pre-Christmas service in Quetta, killing at least nine people and wounding up to 56. The attack was claimed by the Islamic State.

35. It is also common for the government to arrange extra security at churches and in Christian neighbourhoods and parks during the Christmas period.
36. CSW has also reported a spike in cases of blasphemy when the Shia community are about to 'observe' the sacred month of Muharram especially around 9th and 10 of Muharram.
37. In addition, Ahmadis are not allowed to celebrate Eid or to sacrifice animals on Eid-ul-Adha.

### International developments

38. Extremists in Pakistan also often react to developments beyond the country's borders. In July 2023 concerns were raised when the banned Sunni militant group Lashkar-e-Jhangvi issued threats to Christians in Pakistan after an Iraqi-born refugee burnt pages of the Qur'an outside Sweden's largest mosque in the capital Stockholm on the Islamic festival of Eid al-Adha. The group labelled the burning as an attack by Christians on Muslims and called on their followers to attack Christian settlements and kill Christians, while further vowing that they will make Pakistan a 'hell for Christians'.
39. Just two weeks later, residents of Sargodha, Punjab province, discovered a blasphemous poster near a local mosque, which prompted a mob to gather in protest and demand that the police find a Christian from the nearby Christian settlement of Maryam Town. Tensions resulted in most of the 3,000-4,000 Christian families fleeing their homes due to fear of a mob related attacks. Less than one month after that, violence broke out in Jaranwala as detailed above.

### Recommendations to counter the advocacy of hate:

40. **Take action against literature, newspapers, and magazines promoting hatred, extremism, sectarianism and intolerance and take measurable steps to hold social networks/online media platforms accountable for content inciting hatred and violence.**
41. **Prosecute those responsible for perpetrating hate speech against religious minorities, and introduce legislation to address hate speech, while being careful to protect and enhance freedom of expression.**
42. **Ensure that government officials who promote or ally with extremist elements are held to account.**
43. **Increase efforts to reverse the culture of impunity that leads to communal violence by ensuring that perpetrators are brought to justice and adequate levels of compensation are granted to victims.**
44. **Implement the tools of the Rabat Plan of Action and other international programmes for countering religious hatred.**
45. **Review and amend blasphemy laws and ensure procedural amendments are implemented to minimise the abuse of these laws in the short term, moving towards full repeal in the long term.**

46. Conduct full investigations into all incidents of violence against individuals accused of blasphemy, and into other outbreaks of violence and vandalism arising from blasphemy accusations, holding all those responsible to account.
47. Release all those currently imprisoned on blasphemy charges immediately and without condition.
48. Review curriculums to ensure that they respect and recognise the rights and contributions of religious minority communities and rewrite textbooks so that they are based on scientific and empirical principles of thought and inquiry, and incorporate lessons on peace, tolerance, diversity and respect for human rights.
49. Take measurable steps to hold social networks/online accountable for content inciting hatred and violence.
50. Invest in and support initiatives to address racial and religious hatred, to support voices of peace and moderation, and to encourage a reconciliation process.
51. Issue a standing invitation to all UN Special Procedures - including the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, the Special Rapporteur on minority issues, and the Special Rapporteur on freedom of expression.



Fig 2. This image on the window of a local shops states that 'Warning: Qadiani first you should enter into Islam and then enter into the shop'. Again Ahmadis have been termed with the derogatory term of Qadiani.

## Appendix A

### Hate Speech and Incitement to Violence in Offline Spaces - images with descriptions and translations.



Fig 1. This image is an advertisement in which they are calling all people to boycott products manufactured and sold by Ahmadis. The text also mentions Ahmadis as Qadianis which the Ahmadis consider to be a derogatory term used to address them.

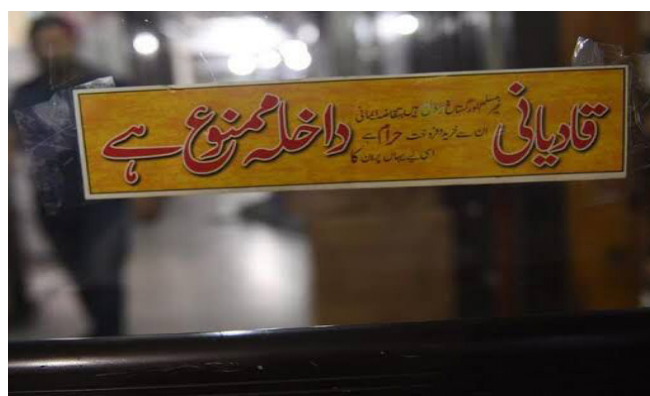


Fig 3. This is a local mobile phones store. The message states 'Qadianis are non-Muslim and violators of the Prophet, and any type of buying or selling with them is considered a sin and that is why they are banned from entering this shop'



Fig 4a. This is a poster that was issued by an extremist group Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, when the incident of the Quran burning in Sweden took place.

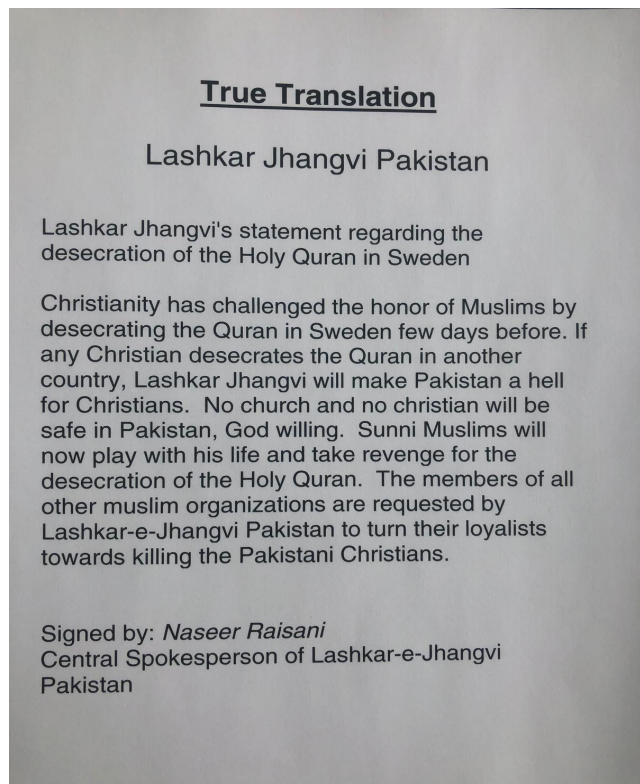


Fig 4b. A translation of the message which is clearly targeting and inciting violence against Christians in Pakistan.



Fig 5. A banner protesting against the police who were instructed to remove any hate speech from shops on the Ahmadiyya community. The banner states 'Any attempt of removal of hate speech on Qadianis by the Police is rejected rejected rejected'.



Fig 6. This banner is by Muhammad Gulzar, President, Tahafuz-e-Khatam-e-Nabuwat Forum Pakistan (Protection of the Finality of the Prophet Forum Pakistan) stating 'According to Pakistani Law 298-C, Qadianis as per Islam are not allowed to sacrifice animals on Eid-ul-Adha. Anyone found in violation of the law should be reported to the Police'.



Fig 7. This poster on a mobile phones shop states 'Entry banned for Qadiani (dogs)'.



Fig 8. This poster on a mobile phones shop states 'Entry banned for Qadiani (dogs)'.

**CSW everyone  
free to believe**

T +44 (0)20 8329 0010  
@CSW\_UK  
/CSWUK  
csw.org.uk

PO Box 99  
New Malden  
Surrey, KT3 3YF  
United Kingdom

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