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PUBLIC STATEMENT

LATEST DEVELOPMENT
May 8, 2019

Pakistan must end blasphemy prosecutions and protect those accused

Asia Bibi's acquittal ended her conviction, but her case shows how a blasphemy accusation can put a person and their family in danger even after a court clears them.

What we know

A Pakistani court sentenced Asia Bibi, a Christian farmworker, to death in 2010. On October 31, 2018, the Supreme Court set aside the conviction after examining serious inconsistencies in the evidence, and it upheld that decision on January 29, 2019. She left Pakistan and arrived in Canada on May 8, 2019, the most recent development in her case. Human Rights Watch has since documented how blasphemy accusations in Pakistan can be used for extortion and to seize property. [1–5]

Our position

A court cleared Asia Bibi, yet she still had to leave her country to be safe. No one should be endangered by an accusation of blasphemy, and the right to hold and express a belief does not depend on the approval of a crowd. Pakistan is a state party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which protects life and freedom of expression. [6–7]

Our calls

Amnesty Freedom calls on the authorities to:

1. Repeal criminal penalties for peaceful expression about religion.
2. Review convictions based on those laws.
3. Provide rapid protection to accused people, their families, lawyers, and judges, including secure relocation where needed.
4. Investigate threats and violence promptly, and apply the Human Rights Committee's guidance on expression in reviewing these laws.

Supporting information

1. Supreme Court of Pakistan, Asia Bibi v. The State, Criminal Appeal No. 39-L of 2015
2. Pakistan: Further information: Asia Bibi leaves Pakistan for Canada a free woman - Amnesty International
3. Pakistan: Aasia Bibi verdict is a landmark victory for religious tolerance - Amnesty International
4. “A Conspiracy to Grab the Land”
5. Pakistan: Government of Pakistan must repeal its blasphemy laws - Amnesty International
6. United Nations, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
7. UN Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 34 on freedom of expression

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Note to editors: *This statement is based on the public sources listed above. The date shown is that of the most recent development recorded in those sources; later developments may not be reflected.*