



Evidence by Global Minorities Alliance

Re: AK & SK (Christians: risk) Pakistan

Presented to the UK All Parliamentary Group on International religious freedom and belief on the 10th and 11th
November, 2015

Author Shahid Khan

Introduction to Global Minorities Alliance

Global Minorities Alliance¹ is a UK charity which advocates the cause of the religious minorities around the world. We have listed Pakistan, among others, as a country of concern. In 2014, we compiled a report entitled '*Invisible citizens of Pakistan*²' which catalogues the widespread persecution of all religious minorities including Christians in Pakistan.

Pakistan: An introduction

Pakistan was not envisioned as an Islamic theocratic state by its founders.³ Theodore Gabriel (2007) argues that the liberal stance of Jinnah and Liaquat Ali Khan was gradually compromised in the years that followed the independence. Gabriel suggests that a shift from the foundational vision of the founding fathers is in contravention of the equal rights to the non-Muslims citizens as enshrined in the *Objective Resolution* of 1949. Global Minorities Alliance views this departure from the principle as an initiation of a series of unjust legislation, widespread patterns of discrimination, absence of legal, judicial and state protection which unfortunately persists to this day.

Patrick Sookhdeo (2002) states that the campaign to enforce Shari'ah began in 1977 with the Pakistan National Alliance and their anti-secular slogan, Nizam-e-Mustafa which was taken up by Zia's military government later the same year.⁴

As is evidenced from the examples cited above suggest the beginnings of the process of the Islamisation of Pakistan had unfortunately commenced soon after the independence of Pakistan which betrayed the trust of the religious minorities of Pakistan, whose leaders at the time had given their explicit consent to accede to a newly created Pakistan.

Blasphemy laws and Christians in Pakistan

¹ Global Minorities Alliance www.globalminorities.co.uk

² GMA report on Pakistani Minorities <http://www.globalminorities.co.uk/gma-reports/invisible-citizens-of-pakistan>

³ Gabriel, T. (2007) '*Christian citizens in an Islamic state*, Ashgate Publishing Ltd. England, pp.24

⁴ Sookhdeo, P. (2002) *A people betrayed, the impact of Islamisation on Christian community in Pakistan*. Christian focus Publications, Geanies House, Scotland pp. 136.

The existing mistrust of Pakistani religious minorities in the state and its organs widened following the introduction of the draconian blasphemy laws which were introduced by the late military dictator General Zia-ul-Haq during the 1980s.

In June 2009, Asia Bibi, a Christian mother of five, was implicated in a blasphemy case. She was subsequently given death sentence by a Pakistani court.⁵

In 2010, brothers Rashid Emmanuel and Sajjad Emmanuel⁶ were shot dead while in police custody on the premises of a Pakistani court in Faisalabad. In March 2011, Shahbaz Bhatti a Christian Federal Minister for Minorities was gunned down for speaking out against Pakistan notorious blasphemy laws⁷.

Forced conversion of Pakistani Christian girls

The Asian Human Rights Commission stated in its report of December 2012⁸ that on average some 700 Christian and 300 Hindu girls are forcibly converted to Islam each year notably in Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh provinces. The police refused to intervene in such cases and courts are said to be complicit in this, by nullifying women's previous non-Islamic marriages and recognising their forced marriages instead.

Movement for Solidarity and Peace (MSP) a non-partisan group in Pakistan analyses the plight of minority women as a "double jeopardy" as they are subjected to "human trafficking, sale through debt transfers, physical abuse and economic exploitation"⁹. In a most recent news story published in the Nation, a daily English newspaper of Pakistan a deaf Christian girl was gang raped by three Muslims men¹⁰

Attacks on Churches and properties

In an article published in Dawn news in March 2015 describes several persecutory incidents against the Christians of Province of Pakistan. It states that "many attacks on the Christian community have left them paralysed with fear and still awaiting justice".¹¹

In March 2013, 17 people were killed when a Christian colony in Lahore, the eastern city of Pakistan, was attacked. In September 2013, a Church in Pakistani city of Peshawar was bombed killing over 100 worshippers. In 2009¹² over 50

⁵ Family of Asia Bibi appeal for help over blasphemy charge

⁶ Rashid and Sajjad Emmanuel shot dead <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-10696762>

⁷ Pakistani minister Shahbaz Bhatti shot dead in Islamabad <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/mar/02/pakistan-minister-shot-dead-islamabad>

⁸ Asian Human Rights Commission report 2012 <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/204621.pdf>

⁹ Movement for Solidarity and Peace https://d3n8a8pro7vhm.cloudfront.net/msp/pages/162/attachments/original/1396724215/MSP_Report_-_Forced_Marriages_and_Conversions_of_Christian_Women_in_Pakistan.pdf?1396724215 p.4

¹⁰ A Christian deaf girl gang raped <http://nation.com.pk/national/27-Oct-2015/deaf-and-mute-christian-woman-gang-raped-in-kasur>

¹¹ Attacks on Christians in Punjab over a decade <http://www.dawn.com/news/1169844>

¹² The Nations report on Gojra and Korian violence: <http://nation.com.pk/politics/02-Aug-2009/9-killed-in-Gojra-riots>

Christian houses in Gorja and Korian, in province of Punjab, were burnt over rumours that Christians had committed blasphemy. Rioting Muslims burnt alive 7 Christians in Gojra.

United States Commission on Religious Freedom¹³ (USCIRF) which monitors global religious violence in its most recent report published in 2015 has placed Pakistan in tier one category of 'Countries of Particular Concern'. The report highlights the loopholes in Pakistani state machinery which is unable to punish the perpetrators of Joseph colony attack which killed 17 members and all those attackers were released on bail.

Pakistani state's failure to protect minorities

Pakistan is ranked 13th on the annual Fragile State Index 2015 in a survey by Washington based research organisation.¹⁴ It describes Pakistan as a state on "high alert". Group grievances, Sectarian violence, attacks on minority groups are few factors which contribute its fractured state structure.

International Religious Freedom report published in 2014 states: "Government policies did not afford equal protection to members of majority and minority religious groups, and due to discriminatory legislation, minorities often were afraid to profess freely their religious beliefs. Media and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) reported killings of religious minorities by police. Minorities also stated the judiciary was biased against religious minorities, especially in cases involving blasphemy."

It stated: "The government's general failure to investigate, arrest, or prosecute those responsible for societal abuses promoted an environment of impunity that fostered intolerance and acts of violence, according to domestic and international human rights organizations. In numerous cases during the year, authorities failed to protect victims of religiously motivated mob violence."¹⁵

Isaac Six and Farahnaz Ispahani in an article published in the Foreign Policy magazine in June 2015 have mentioned the case of Sawan Masih, a Pakistani Christian who was arrested and sentenced to death after having been accused of committing blasphemy. They commented: "This example is consistent with a long-running pattern of prosecuting religious minorities while allowing those who persecute them to escape justice".¹⁶

The above cited evidence gives several examples of religiously motivated violence against the Christians of Pakistan and violence against people belonging to a religion is classed as persecution. (See persecution defined by Helene Lambert)¹⁷

¹³ USCIRF Report, 2015 <http://www.uscirtf.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF%20Annual%20Report%202015%20%282%29.pdf>

¹⁴ Fragile state Index 2015 <http://fsi.fundforpeace.org/rankings-2015>

¹⁵ International Religious Freedom Report 2014 <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>

¹⁶ Persecution without prosecution the fate of minorities in Pakistan <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/06/10/persecution-without-prosecution-the-fate-of-minorities-in-pakistan/>

¹⁷ Lambert. H, *The conceptualisation of persecution* <http://goo.gl/7KOM4j> pp.18

Pakistani Christians do not differ from most of Pakistani people in terms of race and ethnicity. It is, therefore, ludicrous to suggest that they suffer discrimination. (See discrimination defined by Adrian Bogdan)¹⁸

The British government's recent policy in relation to Christians of Pakistan in our view contravenes the UK government's obligation under the Refugee Convention of 1951 to which Britain is a party. We consider the policy in question discriminatory towards the Christians of Pakistan.

The policy shift suggests that Pakistani Christians live in a fair equal and just society and do not suffer persecution and hence they do not meet the criteria for being considered as refugees in the UK. As a matter of fact, Christians in Pakistan suffer from ever increasing fundamentalism, soaring religious intolerance, terrorist attacks on churches, arson attacks and burning Christians alive over fabricated blasphemy accusations. (see above)

We are deeply shocked at the U-turn taken by the British government to deny asylum to the persecuted Christians of Pakistan in the UK. We applaud the Britain's long and proudest tradition to give sanctuary to people fleeing persecution, war and conflicts from around the world and it is beyond us why the current government now would exclude the persecuted Christians of Pakistan?

We urge the United Kingdom to reverse its controversial policy and instead of taking an exclusivist stance in relation to the Christians of Pakistan it rather gives the genuine Christian asylum seekers from Pakistan a level playing field.

¹⁸ Bogdan, A. *Aspects concerning the phenomenon of discrimination from the perspective of the equal rights principle* <http://goo.gl/CJWYny> No. 41 2014 pp.101