

# IPPFoRB

International Panel of Parliamentarians  
for Freedom of Religion or Belief

14 September 2016

His Excellency Shehbaz Sharif  
Chief Minister  
Province of Punjab  
Islamic Republic of Pakistan  
Lahore, Pakistan

Dear Chief Minister Sharif:

We write as a global network of parliamentarians from diverse political, religious, and geographical backgrounds, committed to the promotion and protection of the freedom of religion and belief for all to respectfully raise concerns about human rights abuses occurring in your province through the use of the blasphemy law and discrimination against Ahmadi Muslims.

Many of us welcomed steps your government took to review cases of alleged blasphemy to ensure innocent individuals were not jailed. However, cases continue to arise with numerous new charges being brought, and longtime concerns remain about imprisoned individuals, such as Aasia Bibi. Based on NGO reports, the blasphemy law is wrongly applied against Muslims more than any other faith community, but it has a disproportionate impact on the much smaller minority communities. While the blasphemy law inherently conflicts with Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we recognize Pakistan's blasphemy law is found in the national criminal code and reform is beyond the cognizance of your jurisdiction. At the same time, we ask that you take steps at the provincial level to ensure the law is not abused to settle disputes or to victimize minorities. Such actions would include you speaking out publicly against the misuse of this law; initiating a wider provincial government review of all blasphemy charges and pending cases for evidence of fraud or abuse; ensuring allegations of blasphemy are reviewed at the highest possible level before police file a First Information Report, so as to ensure the law is not abused; and taking legal action against individuals making false allegations to discourage exploitation of the law's vague provisions.

The other issue we wish to raise concerns the actions of authorities in your province against Ahmadi Muslims. It has come to our attention that many of the foundational books of the Ahmadi faith have been banned by Punjab provincial officials. In addition, 80 year old

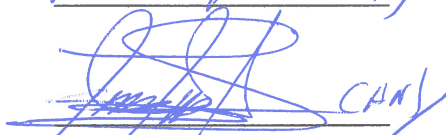
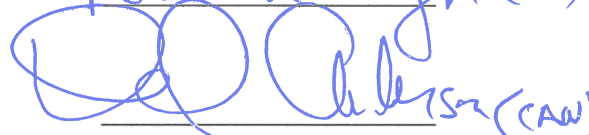
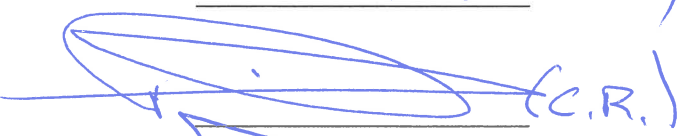
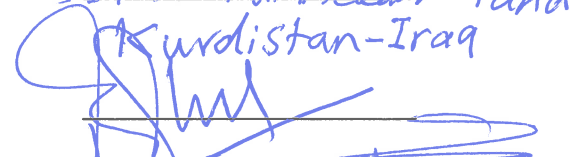
Ahmadi bookseller Abul Shukoor was arrested, tried and sentenced to eight years for selling allegedly extremist and blasphemous literature – which were these books. In addition, his Muslim employee Mazhar Ahmad was also sentenced in a similar way. Ahmadis in Pakistan face many challenges through discriminatory treatment in the constitution, disenfranchisement of their vote, and reoccurring violence. In addition to dealing with these longstanding concerns, we ask that you lift the ban on the Ahmadi books and see that the bookseller and his associate are released.

Mr. Chief Minister, your country has suffered much at the hands of terrorists and extremists. As you know, Pakistan was founded out of a concern for religious minorities in British India and the white bar on Pakistan's flag represents a commitment to minority rights in your country. We want to partner with you and other Pakistanis in helping your country fully realize this ambitious dream.

Sincerely,

*The following parliamentarians support this advocacy letter in their personal capacity*

*and not as representatives of their government, political party or any other body*

<u>Beneda (UK)</u>  <u>EVA SUNDARI (INDONESIA)</u>	<u>Narend Singh (SA)</u>  <u>Amel George (ROM)</u>
<u>Amilcar Pop (Guatemala)</u> <u>Cheryllyn Judley (SA)</u> <u>Bruno (SV)</u>	<u>Dachi Tule (ROM)</u>  <u>Dr. Mohammadi Taha Kurdistan-Iraq</u>
<u>José Alberto Viquez</u> <u>Maby Farkillo (HN)</u>	 <u>Vian da Khil Iraq</u>

The following parliamentarians support this advocacy letter in their personal capacity and not as representatives of their government, political party or any other body

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Nandy Batista (Rep. Som)

Shwe Maung ~~A~~ (Myanmar)

Viktor Yelensky (Ukraine)

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Angel Alvarado (Venezuela)

Nick Dunne (UK)

Kuzem Kheir ~~Ko~~ (Lebanon)

VETON BEKISHA KOSOVO

JUSTUS IZANG MASHAKI NIGERIA

Jacob Nassan

Sofia Infrino Kasungu Mussanguela - ANGOLA

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SUSAN YAP (Philippines)

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