

My name is Nathanael Lewis. I am a trustee of and researcher with the British Pakistani Christian Association. I am co-author of the first seminal BPCA report 'The Targeting of the Minority Other in Pakistan', and I researched the entire section on the suffering of Pakistani Christians covering the last two or three decades or so, which constitutes about a third of that book. I have also been called upon to write reports as a 'country expert' witness for asylum appeal cases of Pakistani Christians whose claims for refuge have been rejected. Due to my day job and the fact that I live so far away from London, I have not been able to come in person, so I have asked for this to be read out on my behalf instead. If it is too long to be read out in full, I will ask for copies to be made available.

I have been asked to comment on several issues. Firstly, I have been asked to say why I believe that the Home Office does not regard Christians as being persecuted, against independently audited assessments that say they are, and indeed, against official Foreign Office public statements saying that Christians are indeed persecuted, and secondly we have been asked about the experiences of some of those leaving Pakistan for this country. I have also interpreted this more broadly, and will deal with the experiences of some people still living in Pakistan.

I will start with the case of Mrs A, a young Christian woman living in a major city, who entered into an arranged marriage with a Christian man. About a month after her marriage, he started beating her and being abusive, about the time she had become pregnant. He sold the car that her family had brought for her so she could get around independently. About four months later, she found several Muslims (male and female) unknown to her in her house, who started congratulating her because four months before her husband had converted to Islam, which was such a complete and total shock to her, she was physically sick. Her husband called her a bitch and lots of abusive names, slandered Christian leaders and praised Muhammed. The next day, one of the men returned, who turned out to be an extremist imam, and both he and her husband demanded she marry her husband in an Islamic ceremony. She refused and her husband beat her more, saying she must convert, and then called back the imams, and beat her again when she challenges this, saying he would kill her if she did not convert. She stated she would rather die than convert, and then said she will take her husband and the clerics to the court and go to the police, as well as saying she hated her husband, the imams and Islam. The rapid response of the clerics was to accuse her of blasphemy and issue fatwa's (religious declarations) against her, as well as notifications in local newspapers. One of them was later reported as doing exactly the same thing in a very similar case in the same city. She managed fairly quickly to escape from the marital home where she was being kept against her will, and fled to her family. However, given that the threat of blasphemy was now extended to her family, she moved to a distant city. However, she was pursued there, with the father intent on gaining custody of the son, to ensure he was brought up a Muslim, and so eventually she fled to the UK, and soon after arriving sought asylum, but her initial claim was rejected.

A more recent case is that of Mrs B. Her husband was a manager in a gas company. Several of his employees were Islamic extremists who continually pressured him to convert to Islam, but he refused, so they made blasphemy allegations against him, and then murdered him, leaving Mrs B a widow looking after one son. Like many Pakistani's, especially Christians, she was reluctant to go to the police, but eventually did after the traditional mourning period was over. The police said that she too had committed blasphemy and detained her, but not in the official cells. This is usually an indication that the police are seeking bribes, but not formally arresting someone with all the

annoying and potentially incriminating paperwork. After several days locked up, the police (presumably) accepted bribes from the two men who had murdered her husband, and these men went in and gang raped her and tortured her with cigarette butts. The next day, a local Christian who pretended to be a Muslim bribed the police to release her.

The BPCA is currently looking after two Christian teenage sisters who were gang-raped as they went out into the fields to go to the toilet by locals from their village, becoming yet more additions to the horrifically high statistics of Christian women sexually assaulted or raped. In many ways their case was typical. The rapists were members of powerful and influential families. The girl's family defied expectations in Pakistan's honour-shame culture which pressure them to keep quiet and initiated a complaint with the police. However, there were attempts to buy them off, and to intimidate them, including gunshots fired at the door of their house whilst family members were standing in the doorway. The case went to trial very recently, despite ongoing threats to the family, but the Muslim lawyer made a very bad job, for whatever reason, even could be said to have actively sabotaged the case, and the rapists were acquitted, leaving the family in shock.

As I write it is the 1st anniversary of the death of the parents of several children that the BPCA is helping to look after. These two were poor rural labourers who to survive had become 'bonded labourers' a kind of debt-based slavery in a brick kiln. The pregnant wife was being abused by the kiln accountant, and as was usual, also cheating the couple out of their debt repayment and wages to keep them effectively slaves. They were seeking to find a way out of their situation and had approached the owner. The wife's father died, and she was clearing out his hut and burning some occult parchments and amulets. She was quickly accused of blasphemy, and local mosques called out for the blaspheming infidels to be punished. A mob quickly formed from surrounding villages. The couple by this time had been locked in a room in the brick kiln offices, but the mob stormed it, dragged them out, stripped them naked, dragged them round the village, beating them so savagely that every limb was broken and threw them – probably alive – into the brick kiln where they had been effectively enslaved. At least some of their children and wider family witnessed this. Local police stood by and did nothing. Although there were some arrests, most of the mob got away, and the strong suspicion is that those arrested and charged – as is usually the case – will get off free. The oldest of the children we are looking after is starting to ask about who killed his parents, particularly after reporters come and ask questions, which is upsetting for already deeply traumatized children.

One more case, not one we dealt with, but for which video documentation is available online. A number of years ago, a Christian rural labourer was pressured to convert by his landlord-cum-employer. The man refused, so the landlord's teenage son took the labourer's two year old daughter into the fields and raped her, leaving her for dead. She remains maimed to this day, with doctors having to create a hole in her stomach for her to urinate. The father went to the police, and local imams were so furious that he had both done this and refused to convert that they accused him of blasphemy. The family had to live on the run for years, moving from safe-house to safe-house, unable to live, to work, all the while having to secretly arrange for many operations for their abused and traumatized daughter. Eventually, they managed to escape to Canada.

I could go on, with statistics and facts and stories, but I trust that other witnesses will describe the broader trends and horrific situation of Christians, who exist in what is effectively a religiously apartheid society. Even the so-called government minority quotas are used to enforce second class

status, mostly trapping Christians in their traditional menial cleaning jobs. The question then is, why does the Home Office insist that Christians are merely 'discriminated against' and not generally persecuted, despite all the evidence to the contrary? For instance, in the 'World Watch Monitor' report, an independently audited annual assessment of the level of persecution of Christians nation by nation, Pakistan has retained its rank of 8th worst in the world over the last couple of years, just behind Iran, and just ahead of war-torn and brutal Eritrea. It is put in the highest ranking – Extreme Persecution, along with North Korea, Iraq, Syria, Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan and Afghanistan.

For me the question has raised itself in other ways, when I see decision makers rejecting asylum claims in ways that make quite clear that the general assessment of the situation in Pakistan they are relying on is utterly at odds with the reality on the ground in many ways. A key area is 'sufficiency of protection'. If Christian asylum seekers have had problems with police in their area, their claim is often rejected because they could have gone to another city (ironically enough, in my last two cases, each was told they could have avoided problematic police by going to the precise areas the other was experiencing severe problems with the police in; also in many cases such asylum seekers have already tried moving cities and provinces). Rejections often point to reports of training by US police on human rights, and alleged 'improvements in police professionalism', but the only evidence cited is the fact that in one riot, police refrained from tear-gassing or using live fire, as they usually did. I researched, and found that this particular riot was Muslims rioting against the 'Innocence of Muhammed' film, which was deemed blasphemous. The mainly Muslim police in the Islamicized Pakistani society would have been intensely sympathetic with the rioters on that occasion, plus the international media were present. Yet this is used as evidence that police in the completely different situation of a vulnerable and despised Christian going to them over, say, a daughter kidnapped and raped and forced to convert, would act professionally. The reality is more often than not that they do not act professionally, and will refuse to register the case, and indeed take the kidnappers side.

I was told by someone with a lot of experience within the asylum process that Country Guidance cases are pretty much always drafted in such a way as to conclude that there isn't a widespread problem, but there are a few areas that may be, basically due to political pressure not to 'open the floodgates', and this must be a factor in the absurd Home Office official position.

Secondly, talking of country guidance cases, the recent SK/AK Christian risk case has a classic example of the way reality can be flipped, partly by selective use of documents or sources (whether deliberate or not). The judge in question was talking about inter-faith marriages in Pakistan, and cited an incident over one such marriage in the annual report of a general human rights organization, but then said that clearly it wasn't a big problem because the next annual report didn't mention it, and went on to give as guidance that interfaith marriage really isn't an issue in Pakistan, which is completely contrary to the truth. Aside from the highly specious logic (absence of evidence is not automatically evidence of absence), the fact is I knew about the aftermath of that particular case, and a quick google search with key names and terms could have revealed that the consequences were extremely serious indeed, and also that this was not an isolated incident. Male-Muslim to Christian-female marriages aren't so much of a problem, but the opposite religious-gender pattern almost invariably results in huge problems, extreme violence and the like, as indeed happened in the very case that the judge was so confident wasn't such a big deal. With guidance like this, it is no wonder that sometimes decision makers basis for their decisions bear no relation to

reality. Whilst I recognize that decision makers have to do a tough job with very tight constraints, and many do their best, I have also seen many cases where decision makers or Home Office officials dealing with appeals are clearly being, let us say, distinctly disingenuous in their approach to material. For instance, in a recent, ongoing case I wrote a report for, a further rejection decision referred to my report and picked out a couple of comments as 'agreeing' with their position, whilst completely misrepresenting the main burden of my report as being the complete opposite of what I actually wrote.

Additionally, in the case of Mrs A, above, the decision maker had stated that Mrs A had 'admitted' she was a 'rebellious wife to her husband', when in fact her testimony said she endeavoured always to obey and only challenged him when he sold her car which was not his to sell and when he beat her to try and force her to convert to Islam. There can be other case specific issues too, and I am concerned that in some cases the credibility of claimant's claims may be brought into question because of the ignorance of decision makers relying on Wikipedia and inadequate understanding, not just of the reality on the ground, but of particular religious sects and practices. In one fairly recent case I wrote a report for, the asylum seekers were rejected partly because they were accused of lying about being Pentecostals. The reasons were that they did not have much knowledge of Pentecost, which one family member conflated with the Ascension of Jesus, and because they did not really celebrate Pentecost as special in the way that traditional liturgical churches do (in fact most Pentecostal churches do not particularly celebrate Pentecost, as they believe that it should be an ongoing daily experience, not a once a year celebration). In addition, the asylum seekers' summary of the distinctives of Pentecostal belief were deemed to be inadequate, when in fact the substance of their answers was exactly the same as I would have given to that question, and I'm a Pentecostal theologian!

Other issues over and above specious or selective use of sources is an often naive over-reliance on official Pakistani government declarations of policy over minority rights and conditions. Any nation will want to spin matters, but in the Pakistani case we really need to be aware a) of the massive Islamicization and radicalisation of society and much of the security and police forces, as well as judiciary and government, meaning that an official policy from a possibly more secular governmental elite will almost inevitably play out differently in reality on the ground (the classic example is the minority quotas I briefly mentioned earlier), and b) how the Pakistani government apparatus, being caught between massively strong forces of Islamic radicalism internally, and yet a funding reliance on Western nations, plus a strong-honour shame culture, resulting in a dynamic where they will go to great lengths to hide the reality of how they really treat minorities (promises of compensation and concern when international media focus is on them after an incident, which vanish like smoke in the wind when the media spotlight moves on is one example). The Pakistani state engages in active misinformation campaigns on this issue – for instance using financial and military inducements as well as false promises about good treatment of minorities to countries such as Sri Lanka and Malaysia to try and force Christians who have fled to these countries to return, where they can more effectively be silenced, as well as using certain Christian stooge leaders to proclaim to the West that Christians are well treated in Pakistan (beware the bishops is a good motto here in regard to the Church of Pakistan, for example). Whilst I have no evidence, it would not surprise me in the least if Home Office officials or policy makers have been targeted with – perhaps more subtle – misinformation campaigns and spin.

So, to summarize why I think the Home Office says Pakistani Christians aren't persecuted when they blatantly are:

- a) Political pressure to not 'open the floodgates' for mass refugee movements
- b) A highly selective reading of the evidence and sources, for whatever reason, including, I suspect not realizing the severity of the extreme everyday apartheid like discrimination, resulting in erroneous guidance, and erroneous decisions based on that guidance. They would do well to look not just at our research, but also the highly respected and independently audited 'World Watch Monitor' assessments which rank persecution as extreme in Pakistan.
- c) Naive over-reliance on official Pakistani government pronouncements, or indeed claims that Western programs have delivered improvements in eg human rights record of police
- d) Potentially misinformation by the Pakistani government, whether deliberate, or indeed as a result of the honour-shame instinct to hide the reality from outsiders, perhaps with fears about aid funding.