



## Meet Masud - Ahmadiyya Muslim Community of Pakistan face prejudice, discrimination and attacks.

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The Ahmadiyya community of Pakistan face prejudice, discrimination and attacks. It is illegal for them to practise their religion.

*'As-Salaam-Alaikum'*.

*'Wa-Alaikum-Salaam'*.

Dr Masud and I exchange greetings in the mosque of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in Glasgow.

That doesn't sound too controversial, does it? However, if, instead of being in Scotland, we were in Lahore, Karachi or anywhere in Pakistan, a three year jail-term could be the result.

I am not a Muslim and therefore I'm ok, but Dr Masud and any of the 4 million Ahmadis in Pakistan are liable for prosecution for using greetings that are associated with Islam, for calling their place of worship a 'mosque' or for calling themselves Muslim. The Constitution of Pakistan states in effect that it is illegal to be an Ahmadiyya Muslim in direct and extreme defiance of Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Dr Masud is now in his 70s and his kindly face gives no hint of stress. He reminisces about coming to the UK in the 1960s but, missing his motherland, he returned to Pakistan in 1984. There, he practised homeopathic medicine until, in 2014, he was visited by a supposed patient who engaged him in religious debate. Using a mobile phone, the 'patient' filmed Dr Masud, recorded him quoting a verse from the Qur'an and then called 15, the Pakistan equivalent of 999. Police were already waiting outside the clinic and Dr Masud was arrested and taken to the police station. Within minutes a mob had gathered demanding that the Qadiani be given to them. ('Qadiani' is a pejorative word used by opponents of the Ahmadis and refers to the town where the Ahmadi founder, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, was born.) For several hours there was a standoff between the mob and the police but eventually, under heavy armed guard, Dr Masud was taken to the court and to prison. His only 'offense' was reciting a verse from the Qur'an.

Potentially, Dr Masud was in a very dangerous situation.



Several Ahmadis have been imprisoned solely for practising their religion and nine are currently behind bars for this 'crime'. In October last year, three Ahmadis were sentenced to death for blasphemy after they pulled down religious posters which were critical of the Ahmadis. The day before they were sentenced, a prominent MP, speaking at the National Assembly, said, 'These people [Ahmadis] are a threat to this country, its constitution and ideology. This situation is heading towards a dangerous point'.

Abdul Shakoor is in his 80s and is serving eight years imprisonment for allegedly selling books like the Qur'an. He was charged under anti-terrorism laws.

However, Dr Masud was saved because of the time he had spent in the UK. Although he no longer had a British passport, Dr Masud had become a British citizen and so, after being granted bail, he was given temporary documents from the British High Commission and was able to get on a flight to the UK. Dr Masud now lives in the supportive community of Glasgow. But wouldn't it be good if he was free to visit his homeland?

As was affirmed at last year's annual conference, Amnesty UK is committed to struggle for the rights of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community to practise their religion. So I urge you to write to the Pakistani High Commissioner in London requesting that Pakistan honours and recognises Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which should guarantee 'the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion'. This is not only about Dr Masud and Abdul Shakoor; it is about millions of persecuted Ahmadis in Pakistan, Indonesia and beyond.

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