



Briefing: Unjust Imprisonment of Mr Abdul Shakoor ('Shakoor Bhai') in Pakistan



Issue

On 2 December 2015, an 80 year old Ahmadi Muslim optician and bookseller Mr Abdul Shakoor (Shakoor Bhai), was arrested for stocking the Holy Quran and other books on peace published by the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. Mr Mazhar Abbas, a Shia Muslim who was working as a shop assistant, was also arrested.

Punjab's Counter Terrorism Department accompanied by Pakistan's Elite Force raided the bookshop in Rabwah, Pakistan. Officers seized books, magazines, cash and even gift vouchers from the bookstore. Publications included translated copies of the Holy Quran, the biography of the founder of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community and the Ahmadiyya Muslim community's Daily Al-Fazl newspaper. Both Shakoor Bhai and his assistant were arrested and taken to an unknown location where they were denied the right to contact their respective families.

On 2 January 2016 Pakistan's Anti-Terrorism Court sentenced Shakoor Bhai to 8 years imprisonment, comprising 5 years imprisonment under Pakistan's anti-terrorism legislation and 3 years imprisonment under anti-Ahmadi legislation. Shakoor Bhai was also ordered to pay a fine of Rs. 600,000. His assistant, Mazhar Abbas was imprisoned for 5 years under anti-terror laws and ordered to pay a fine of Rs. 100,000. Both defendants were denied the right to a fair trial as the case was rushed through the courts, with no time for a proper defence to be prepared and presented. Moreover, the only witnesses to testify at trial were for the prosecution which only included the officers who raided the bookstore.

It is astonishing that Pakistani authorities have used anti-terrorism legislation, which was introduced to curb the rise of extreme sectarian violence in Pakistan, to convict an 80 year old shopkeeper who is a member of one of Pakistan's most peaceful religious communities. In contrast the real terrorists of Pakistan, who routinely incite violence, murder and mayhem face no sanction and remain at large, thereby destroying Pakistan's hopes for peace and prosperity.

Action

One year on Shakoor Bhai and his assistant remain behind bars on completely spurious charges.

We call on the Government of Pakistan to:

- **Immediately release Shakoor Bhai and Mazhar Abbas.**
- **Repeal the blasphemy laws and anti-Ahmadiyya legislation.**
- **Uphold its obligations as a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and grant all its citizens complete freedom of religion.**

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