

PAKISTAN

REPORT 2023

APPG FoRB

INTERNATIONAL FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF



All-Party Parliamentary Group for
International Freedom of
Religion or Belief



ABOUT

The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for International Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) is a group of over 170 cross-party parliamentarian members who champion the right to FoRB, as outlined in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The APPG FoRB mission statement reads: “We are to raise awareness and profile of International Freedom of Religion or Belief as a human right amongst parliamentarians, media, government and the general public in the UK; and to increase effectiveness and awareness of the UK’s contribution to international institutions charged with enforcing this human right.”

Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) states, “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.” The APPG FoRB was established in 2012 and benefits from the expertise of more than 20 human rights and faith-based stakeholder organisations. This is not an official publication of the House of Commons or the House of Lords. It has not been approved by either House or its committees. All-Party Parliamentary Groups are informal groups of members of both Houses with a common interest in particular issues. The views expressed in this report are those of members of the delegation to Pakistan. The work of the APPG is also made possible by financial support from the APPG’s stakeholders, whose names can be found on the APPG’s website via <https://appgfreedomofreligionorbelief.org/stakeholders/>.

Published November 2023.

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FOREWORD



JIM SHANNON MP
CHAIR OF THE APPG FOR
INTERNATIONAL FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF

Pakistan holds a special and dear place in my heart. This started 15 years ago when I was introduced to the beauty of the country from a colleague in my early years of becoming an MP. I have devoted my time and talents to helping Christians, and those of other faiths and none, to experience the freedoms that I have. It is my desire that all be allowed to worship how, where or what they may without prejudice or consequence.

I visited Pakistan in 2018 to see what could be done to assist religious minorities within this country and this report was a follow up visit. As we visited here in 2023, our delegation saw positive improvements including the establishment of the long-awaited National Minorities Commission and noted the reduction in attacks against Christian communities.

Pakistan however is still very much a country of concern. The persecution of Ahmadi Muslims has worsened since 2021, there has been a surge in blasphemy allegations which disproportionately target religious minority communities, terrorist attacks on Shia mosques have escalated and more needs to be done to prevent the abduction and forced marriage of girls from religious minority communities.

Worryingly since our visit, in August, eight Christian churches in the Punjab were burned in just one day and in July, two Hindu temples and a shrine were destroyed in Karachi over a weekend. This is in addition to the shocking rise of attacks on Ahmadi Muslim mosques and graves.

It is my hope that this final report leads to an improvement in the state of freedom of religion or belief in Pakistan. The recommendations contained herein offer a strategic way forward for the Government of Pakistan to engender positive change.



FLEUR ANDERSON MP
MEMBER OF THE APPG FOR
INTERNATIONAL FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF

Pakistan is a wonderful country which Britain has very strong links with. We are proud of this working together for the good of our citizens. I celebrate the links of many constituents in Putney, Roehampton and Southfields with people and communities in Pakistan. For this reason, I was very pleased to be a part of the delegation and to work with the FoRB APPG following the UK's hosting of the international FoRB summit.

This visit was held as part of the All-Party Parliamentary Group's recognition that freedom of religion and belief is a human right that extends far beyond the right to practice religion but also to be free from religious-based discrimination or persecution. I learned a great deal about the background to the issues that many of my constituents have faced in Pakistan, and at many times it was distressing to hear the stories. We saw very separate living areas for Christians and Ahmadi Muslims which have reduced public services, increased threats, and fewer life opportunities than others.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to meet with us, from Ministers and Assembly Members to human rights defenders and organisations to people most affected by the issues we were looking at.

Thank you for reading this report. We offer the recommendations as very practical ways in which human rights can be upheld for all Pakistanis as the constitution promises, and that will bring great economic prosperity and growth to Pakistan.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2018, the All-Party Parliamentary Group for International Freedom of Religion or Belief and the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Pakistani Minorities visited Pakistan to explore FoRB issues and engage with Supreme Court Chief Justices, human rights activists, and religious leaders. These meetings explored issues which affected the religious minorities. Following this visit a report was published detailing the findings of the delegation.¹ In 2023 a follow-up delegation visited the country to assess the state of freedom of religion or belief in the country.

The delegation noted that over the last four years there have been some positive developments including the release of Asia Bibi, better implementation of the five percent minority jobs quota, introduction of the two percent minority quota for higher education institutes, and the formation of a National Commission for Minorities.

However, despite these positive indicators, the situation for religious minorities in Pakistan has deteriorated. The use of blasphemy laws to settle grudges or target minorities has become more prevalent, with 2023 seeing a spike in allegations alongside more arrests and vigilante killings linked to blasphemy allegations. This has been fuelled by recent legislation, political rhetoric and increasing hate speech (particularly online). While the situation for Hindus and Christians has remained relatively stable there has been a significant increase in anti-Ahmadi Muslim sentiment even at a state level. Alarmingly this sentiment was prevalent in several of our meetings. Finally little progress has been made on the forced conversions and forced marriages of young girls.

This report appreciates that Pakistan faces many challenges, but at the same time, Pakistan has a constitutional framework which guarantees religious freedom and has committed to numerous international laws on freedom of religion or belief. It is time to implement these pledges and translate words into action.

Across all interviews during the visit, four topics arose as common threads. These were a failure of legal protections for minorities in Pakistan, an increase in the persecution of Ahmadi Muslims, increase in allegations and threats through the weaponisation of blasphemy laws, and the abduction and forced marriage of girls from minority communities. The report focuses on these four areas and the conclusions and recommendations are drawn from these interviews.

Since the visit, there has been a dramatic, troubling increase in attacks against minority communities, protests, and religious structures. These have particularly targeted the Christian, Hindu, Sikh communities and Ahmadi Muslims. 24 Christian churches have been destroyed in recent times, many historic Hindu temples and shrines have been vandalised and destroyed, and over 40 Ahmadi Muslim mosques have been desecrated this year alone

¹ [190918-Intro-and-Executive-Summary-Religious-Minorities-of-Pakistan-Report-of-a-Parliamentary-Visit.pdf](https://www.apogfreedomofreligionorbelief.org/)

While these developments do not fall in the chronological purview of this report, they are particularly problematic and must be addressed in future research, policy updates, aid distribution, and foreign relations discussions.

INTERVIEWS

During the trip between the 11-18 February 2023, the APPG delegation held 26 meetings with members of civil society, the government, and faith leaders. A great deal of care was taken to investigate the current legal provisions of Freedom of Religion or Belief in the Constitution, Law and in other policies implemented from the government as well as look at the way in which the law is implemented in the country for religious minorities. The members of the delegation were:

Jim Shannon MP	Democratic Unionist Party MP for Strangford, and Chair of the APPG FoRB
Fleur Anderson MP	Labour Party MP for Putney, Shadow Minister for Northern Ireland, and Member of the APPG FoRB
Julie Jones	Director of the APPG FoRB
Fareed Ahmad	National Secretary for External Affairs, Ahmadiyya Muslim Community UK
Cecil Chaudhry	South Asia Deputy Team Leader for CSW (Christian Solidarity Worldwide)

The APPG would like to thank all the people we met for being part of the interview process. A number of interviews were conducted with NGOs, victims of blasphemy allegations, abductions, or persons living under death threats. For these interviews identities have been redacted following security advice.

- Mian Riaz Hussain Pirzada, Federal Minister for Human Rights
- Hina Rabbani Khar, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs
- Raja Pervaiz Ashraf, Speaker of the Pakistan National Assembly
- The British High Commission
- Dr. Shoaib Suddle, Chairman of the One-Man Commission
- Representatives from the charity WaterAid
- Rimsha (Christian Colony)
- Council of Islamic Ideology
- The National Commission for Human Rights
- The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan
- Lawyers representing Hindu victims of forced abductions
- Ahmadi Muslim officials, and victims of persecution
- A roundtable with various embassies
- Representatives of the Sikh Gurdwara, Nankana Sahib

CONSTITUTIONAL AND LEGAL PROVISIONS

Freedom of religion or belief is enshrined in Pakistan's constitutional and legislative instruments. Article 20 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan (1973) provides that:

Subject to law, public order, and morality: -

- (a) every citizen shall have the right to profess, practise and propagate his religion; and
- (b) every religious denomination and every sect thereof shall have the right to establish, maintain and manage its religious institutions.

The preamble to the 1973 Constitution declares that:

[a] adequate provisions shall be made for the minorities to profess and practice their religions and develop their cultures, [and that] fundamental rights, including the equality of status, of opportunity and before law, social, economic, and political justice, and freedom of thought, expression, belief, faith, worship, and association, subject to law and public morality [shall be accorded to all citizens].²

This makes a commitment to protect the legitimate interests of minorities.³ The Constitution provides for ten parliamentary seats to be reserved for non-Muslims, which consist of Christians, Hindus and persons belonging to the Scheduled Castes, Sikhs, Buddhists, Parsi Communities, and other non-Muslims.

The constitutional right of every citizen to profess, practise and propagate his religion is strengthened by additional provisions within the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan (1973) in articles 21, 25, 26(1), 27(1) and 28.

The founder of Pakistan, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, famously declared in 1947, "You are free! You are free to go to your temples. You are free to go to your mosques or to any other places of worship in this State of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion, caste or creed—that has nothing to do with the business of the state." From its very creation, the state of Pakistan was intended and poised to be a place of free worship and belief, a reality to which it has utterly failed to live up over the last six decades.

Internationally, Pakistan has made numerous commitments to international human rights and minority rights standards. This is affirmed by Pakistan becoming a party to the International Bill of Human Rights (consisting of the Universal Declaration on Human

² Government of Pakistan, The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan 1973, Government of Pakistan <http://www.pakistani.org/pakistan/constitution> (as amended) (last accessed 1 July 2019).

³ Ibid. the Preamble, *The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan* 1973

Rights,⁴ the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights⁵ and the International Covenant on Economic and Social Rights).⁶ The aforementioned human rights instruments also contain guarantees of equality of treatment and protection of individuals belonging to minorities. In addition, Pakistan has also ratified the Convention against Torture,⁷ Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide,⁸ the International Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Racial Discrimination,⁹ Convention on Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women,¹⁰ the Convention on the Rights of the Child¹¹ and the Convention on the Rights of the Persons with Disabilities.¹²

Despite these legal protections the religious freedom conditions in the country have continued to deteriorate. This has been driven by an increase in blasphemy allegations, denial of rights to Ahmadi Muslims, and entrenched discrimination against other religious minorities.

Contrary to the provisions of the 1973 constitution Pakistan has enacted laws that specifically discriminate against Ahmadi Muslims. Namely:

- In 1974 Prime Minister Bhutto amended the Pakistan Constitution to declare Ahmadi Muslims as not Muslim for the purposes of law and constitution.
- In 1984, under General Zia, the Government of Pakistan enacted Ordinance XX, that also amended Section 298 of the Pakistan Penal Code, making it a criminal offence, punishable by 3 years imprisonment and a fine, for Ahmadi Muslims to:
 1. Call themselves Muslims
 2. Refer to their faith as Islam
 3. Call their place of worship a ‘Mosque’
 4. Make the Islamic call for prayers (Adhan)
 5. Preach or propagate their faith
 6. “Pose” as Muslims
- These laws and their application constitute a denial of the rights of Ahmadi Muslims to freely profess and practise their faith without interference from the state. The laws conflict with the constitutional right to freedom of religion enshrined in

⁴ 10 December 1948, UN GA Res. 217 A(III), UN Doc. A/810 at 71 (1948).

⁵ Adopted at New York, 16 December 1966. Entered into force 23 March 1976. GA Res. 2200A (XXI) UN Doc. A/6316 (1966) 999 U.N.T.S. 171; 6 I.L.M. (1967) 368. (Ratified 23 June 2010).

⁶ Adopted at New York, 16 December 1966. 993 U.N.T.S. 3; 6 I.L.M. (1967) 360. (Ratified 17 April 2008)

⁷ Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, New York, 10 December 1984 United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 1465, p. 85. (Ratified 23 June 2010).

⁸ 77 UNTS 277; HMSO, Misc. No (1966), Cmnd 2904 (ratified 12 October 1957).

⁹ International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, New York, 7 March 1966 United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 660, p. 195. ‘Pakistan was amongst the very first States to sign the Convention and the third to ratify it’ 6th Periodic Report of Pakistan before the Committee, CERD/C/66/Add.10, para 8. (Ratified 21 September 1996).

¹⁰ International Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women, New York, 18 December 1979, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 1249, p. 13. (Accession 12 March 1996).

¹¹ Convention on the Rights of the Child, New York, 20 November 1989 United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 1577, p. 3. (Ratified 12 November 1990).

¹² Convention on the Rights on the Rights of the Persons with Disabilities, New York, 13 December 2006, UN Doc. A/61/488. (Ratified 5 July 2011).

Pakistan's constitution and represent a violation of international human rights treaties to which Pakistan is a signatory.



Meeting with Raja Pervaiz Ashraf, Speaker of the Pakistan National Assembly.

BLASPHEMY LAWS

In 1986, the country's blasphemy laws were amended to introduce the death penalty for blasphemy and made it open to abuse by allowing cases to be registered based on mere allegations of blasphemy. Since then, these laws have been weaponised to target minorities despite no evidence of blasphemy.

On 17 January 2023, the National Assembly passed an amendment to the Criminal Laws (Amendment) Bill 2023. This amendment increased the punishment for blasphemy under the law by removing the possibility of bail, widening the criteria of what could be considered blasphemous, and introducing a minimum term of ten years in jail. The bill passed Pakistan's upper house on 7 August. Whilst this bill was not assented by the outgoing President, and Pakistan is currently awaiting its next elections, it is widely considered that this will be enacted by Pakistan's next government.

The Humans Rights Commission of Pakistan expressed concern over the new legislation, stating that given "Pakistan's troubled record of the misuse of such laws, these amendments are likely to be weaponised disproportionately against religious minorities and sects, resulting in false FIRs (first-incident reports),¹³ harassment, and persecution.

¹³ A first information report (FIR) is a document prepared by police organisations in Pakistan when they receive information about the commission of an offence.

Moreover, increasing the penalty for alleged blasphemy will aggravate misuse of the law to settle personal vendettas.”¹⁴

There is already evidence to support this view. The first half of 2023 has seen a sharp rise in the number of blasphemy allegations, harsher sentences, and lynchings. Between January and May 57 blasphemy cases were registered in Pakistan¹⁵. This is more than the total for the previous two years (23 in 2022 and 84 in 2021) and represents an increase of 230% on the same period in 2022.

On the first day of the APPG visit (11th February 2023) Mohammad Waris was killed by a mob in Nankana Sahib following allegations he desecrated the Quran. Muhammad Waris had been taken into custody over the allegations; however, the police station was surrounded, and a crowd demanded that he be handed over to them.

Police officers fled and the man was dragged out to the street and killed. This incident received significant attention in many of the interviews. While it is a particularly shocking example, and should not be considered a ‘one off,’ it is rather an illustration of the wider trend of increased blasphemy allegations, which not only affect religious minorities, but also the wider population.

The impact is not only a direct threat to life but also a chilling effect on many aspects of normal life for religious minorities who constantly fear being falsely accused.

During the APPG’s visit, the delegation expressed concerns about the use of blasphemy allegations to attack or suppress the freedom of religious minorities. The British High Commission noted that the laws around blasphemy are often misused, and people have used allegations to settle scores or to try and take land or businesses.

The Federal Minister for Human Rights acknowledged there were issues with the misuse of the law. These issues were attributed to a “lack of rule of law by provincial governments” and his department was looking at ways to deter false allegations. This included the introduction of more severe penalties for those who abuse the blasphemy laws. This problem was also identified by the Council of Islamic Ideology who sought to resolve allegations by mediation, noting that this approach had prevented 106 cases going to court. However, the Council was adamant that Ahmadi Muslims could not be accepted as Muslims and therefore would not benefit from the Council’s work.

Interviewees noted that contention over blasphemy laws is often included within the rhetoric of political parties, using it as a wedge issue to try and boost their popularity. Concerns were raised over the presence of discrimination and hatred against minorities in the teaching curriculum and unregulated teaching resources that also promoted hatred.

¹⁴ Pakistan: Amendment to Blasphemy Law Passes in Lower House of Parliament, Library of Congress <https://www.loc.gov/item/global-legal-monitor/2023-02-13/pakistan-amendment-to-blasphemy-law-passes-in-lower-house-of-parliament/>.

¹⁵ <https://www.aninews.in/news/world/asia/57-blasphemy-cases-registered-in-pakistan-from-january-to-may-2023-report20230621211423/>

Examples of primary education textbooks which contained language which directed discrimination and hate towards Ahmadi Muslims were shared with the delegation.



Meeting with Mian Riaz Hussain Pirzada, Federal Minister for Human Rights.

The instability following the departure of former Prime Minister Imran Khan and the expected imminent elections are likely to be major drivers in the increase of blasphemy allegations in 2023. These allegations disproportionately affect the country's religious minorities. Even though more than 90% of Pakistan's population identify as Muslim, blasphemy accusations against minority religious groups account for roughly 50% of all cases.¹⁶

While there was acceptance from government officials of the misuse of blasphemy allegations there was an unwillingness to look at the factors that contributed to this abuse. Instead, the APPG was told that blasphemy allegations and resulting vigilante violence was caused by a variety of factors including that it was a plot by hostile foreign states, a reaction to visiting delegations, or the impact of terrorism.

The APPG was encouraged to hear that there are attempts to deter false allegations. However, these efforts need to be accompanied by administrative and legislative changes that better protect all citizens from these allegations. The delegation is concerned that the ongoing denial by the Government as a whole is the root cause of this problem and of the rise in cases in recent months. The passing of the Criminal Laws (Amendment) Bill 2023 broadens the criteria of what is considered blasphemous and removes any possibility of bail, ensuring that those accused will be incarcerated. We are concerned that this will increase the number of allegations targeting minority communities; therefore, we urge the Government of Pakistan to place safeguards and monitoring mechanisms to ensure this does not happen.

¹⁶ Pakistan's Blasphemy Laws and the Role of Forensic Psychiatrists, The Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry, and the Law, <https://jaapl.org/content/early/2020/01/24/JAAPL.003916-20> (accessed 20th August 2023)

Blasphemy allegations are closely linked with hate speech. New legislation has been introduced to monitor content online. There are also specific blasphemy laws that specifically target Ahmadi Muslims, and the delegation noted a hardening of these laws and their application, as detailed in the report.

INCREASE IN PERSECUTION OF AHMADI MUSLIMS

State-sponsored persecution of Pakistan's Ahmadiyya Muslim Community has been systemic in Pakistan. In 1974 an amendment was made to the Constitution, declaring Ahmadis to be not-Muslims, making it illegal for Ahmadis to identify as Muslim. It also referred to the community using the derogatory slur 'Qadianis'¹⁷, which also was used by some officials across interviews to refer to Ahmadi Muslims.

While in general there has been a slight improvement of conditions for Christian and Hindu minorities, there has been a drastic worsening of the persecution of Ahmadi Muslims. The APPG was alarmed to experience this discrimination first hand both by it being directed towards a member of the delegation, who was uninvited to some meetings with officials as well as through accounts of victims who were interviewed. During the visit, information presented by the APPG, and the work of the British High Commission, about Ahmadi Muslims in Pakistan was dismissed by state officials as 'propaganda'.

Authorities routinely arrest, jail, and charge members of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community under the anti-Ahmadi and blasphemy laws and while both the police and vigilante groups desecrate graveyards, demolish the minarets of Ahmadi Muslim mosques, and commit acts of violence against Ahmadi Muslims.

Since 2021 there has been a spike in violent attacks against Ahmadis, and a tenfold increase in blasphemy cases lodged against them since 2021.¹⁸ Prior to the trip, various NGOs including Amnesty International linked this increase in persecution and increased hostile rhetoric targeting the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community to the rise of the political party Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP). Amnesty International's Deputy South Asia Director stating "the rise of the TLP sends a clear signal to minority communities that they remain vulnerable to discrimination, harassment or even violence...it creates an atmosphere of dread, encouraging self-censorship, making it impossible to follow religious rituals without incurring a significant risk".¹⁹ The delegation heard how the authorities tend to handle the TLP with undue care and consideration, resulting in severe violations of religious minorities' freedom of religion or belief. The delegation heard how groups such as Khatme Nabuwat, and Jamaate Islami are also active in spreading anti-Ahmadi hostility and violence.

The delegation met with survivors of vigilante violence, visited an Ahmadi Muslim graveyard that had been desecrated and mosques which had been damaged, destroyed or forced to

¹⁷ 'Qadiani' is a derogatory term used to refer to Ahmadi Muslims and refers to the birthplace of the founder of the community in Qadian, India.

¹⁸ <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2021-10/2021%20Ahmadiyya%20Persecution%20Factsheet.pdf>

¹⁹ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/7/26/ahmadi-persecution-pakistan-blasphemy-islam>

close. The delegation was advised that more than 200 Ahmadi Muslim graves have been desecrated since last two years. Furthermore, the delegation was shown evidence of anti-Ahmadi hatred including graffiti with the words ‘Kuta Qadiani,’ meaning ‘Qadiani dog,’ painted on a wall in a public highway. In multiple interviews recommendations for a law to protect places of worship and burial sites were suggested.

The delegation noted that much of the violence comes from non-state actors which includes the actions of the TLP, Khatme Nabuwat and vigilantes. However, the delegation also heard multiple credible reports of how members of the police and state officials were also complicit – either by carrying out the desecrations or by standing by and allowing acts of violence to occur with impunity. Cases included the destruction of mosques and graves, and violent assaults. Given the relevant Constitutional provision and Chief Justice Jillani’s verdict of 2014, Pakistan must forbid the destruction of minarets of Ahmadi Muslim mosques by state authorities, and direct the authorities to prosecute clerics who promote and implement defiling of worship places and graves.

The nature of hostility is also deeply concerning. The delegation heard that in September 2022, Muhammad Naeem Chattha Qadri, a senior cleric belonging to TLP called on his supporters to carry out attacks against pregnant Ahmadi Muslim women to “ensure that no new Ahmadis are born” and went on to say, “Those babies who are being born, should be killed.” Throughout the speech, the cleric shouted various slogans including “there is but only one punishment for blasphemers, decapitation!” In his speech the cleric openly warned the police not to provide protection to Ahmadi Muslim families. Pakistan’s former minister of state for parliamentary affairs, Ali Muhammad Khan also called for the beheading of people who commit blasphemy.²⁰

Additionally, the delegation was shocked to learn that (Hafiz) Tahir Mehmood Ashrafi who was serving as the Pakistan Prime Minister’s Special Adviser on Religious Harmony, and Chief of the All-Pakistan Ulema Council in Pakistan, was seen in an open multi-religious meeting asserting the following: "... I am not willing to accept them (Qadianis) in this country... To speak against Qadianis is religious harmony." ²¹ He also justified recent attacks in 2023 on Ahmadi Muslim mosques in Pakistan citing that Ahmadi places of worship should not resemble ‘Muslim mosques and thus minarets should be removed.’

The delegation also noted that clerics such as Hasan Muawiyah have been working to lodge baseless blasphemy cases against Ahmadi Muslims.

In Punjab, the mandatory declaration of faith for marriage certificates has further marginalised the Ahmadiyya community, while attempts to enforce a standardised national curriculum have created an exclusionary narrative that sidelines Pakistan’s religious minorities.

The delegation was encouraged with the responses from some officials within the Pakistan Government. The Federal Minister for Human Rights expressed concern at the rise of

²⁰<https://www.aninews.in/news/world/asia/pakistan-tlp-cleric-calls-for-attack-on-ahmadi-pregnant-women20221009121400/>

²¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jRBPSsQhDj0>

persecution against Ahmadi Muslims. The delegation also noted that Ahmadi Muslims were also adversely impacted in their civic rights such as the right to vote.

The 2018 High Court judgment by Justice Shaukat Aziz, called for the targeting and persecution of Ahmadis to be much more extensive, e.g. by having distinct names and wearing distinct clothes so they could be readily identified and not “hide” as Muslims anywhere, especially in public services – where they should be removed from senior positions.

The delegation further noted that since the last visit in 2018, laws and regulatory measures have been implemented in Pakistan, including the cyberlaws²² that are being used to target content that the regulator – the Pakistan Telecommunications Authority (PTA) – deems blasphemous, so in effect are a backdoor to the blasphemy laws. These wide-ranging powers empower the PTA to curtail legitimate rights under international laws with regards to freedom of religion or belief. This has resulted in a wave of action by the PTA to censor peaceful content and information, including blocking all Ahmadi Muslim websites, issuing notifications of targeted fines for service providers and/or social media companies of up to 500 million rupees and issuing of emergency 24-hour takedown notices for Ahmadi websites and social media accounts in Pakistan and other countries for content deemed blasphemous.

In practice, these laws have been used to close the last remaining means for Ahmadi Muslims to access material for learning about their own faith. The delegation heard that over the space of two years, 18 Ahmadi Muslims had been detained under these laws and there were six Ahmadi Muslim prisoners of conscience. This builds on earlier laws curtailing their educational rights with action by state to prohibit Ahmadi Muslims from publishing the Holy Quran²³, and which ban the entire religious texts of the founder of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community.

The delegation visited a school and met pupils to better understand the impact of persecution on Ahmadi Muslim children. One of the teachers said, “Life in general as an Ahmadi comes with many restrictions on us. We can’t use any Islamic terms. We must keep silent on social media. We cannot defend ourselves. Our girls when they go to college have the challenge of speaking out to say they are Ahmadi and being subjected to abuse. If teachers find out someone is Ahmadi, then they refuse to teach them.”

The delegation also noted that schools established and owned by the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community were nationalised by the state and not returned to the community despite it having met all legal requirements.

This was despite the Supreme Court ruling of 22 February 2000 which stated that the ownership of nationalised institutions rests with the original owners. The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community’s writ petitions are yet to be heard by a judge.

²² These include the amendment to the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act 2016 (PECA) and the Removal and Blocking of Unlawful Online Content Rules 2021

²³ https://na.gov.pk/uploads/documents/1492604974_275.pdf

The anti-Ahmadi laws, the scale of anti-Ahmadi hostility made clear to the delegation that Pakistan is not safe for Ahmadi Muslims, not even their headquarters of Rabwah, Punjab where Ahmadis have been murdered and subjected to surveillance, police raids and a stream of hostile anti-Ahmadi rallies and hate speech.

It is clear that Ahmadi Muslims are targeted solely due to their religious identity. The conditions inflicted upon the group clearly result in serious bodily and mental harm to its members and could amount to efforts to physically destroy the cultural and religious heritage of Ahmadi Muslims in Pakistan. If intent can be proven, then this may meet the standards laid down in Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.



Meeting with Hina Rabbani Khar, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs.

ABDUCTIONS/FORCED MARRIAGES

In 2018, the APPG delegation was alarmed at the widespread abduction, forced marriage, and forced conversion of women and girls from Christian and Hindu communities. In the last 5 years there has been little progress on ending this abuse.

The scale of practice is difficult to ascertain, and the number of victims is contested. An inquiry held by the APPG for Pakistani Minorities identified that the probable number of victims was around 1,000 a year.²⁴ The United States Commission for International Religious Freedom notes that “most victims were minors, and at least 23 percent were

²⁴ APPG for Pakistani Minorities Inquiry: Abduction, Forced Conversions, and Forced Marriages of Religious Minority Women and Girls in Pakistan, https://www.appgforpakminorities.com/_files/ugd/6f7fe6_372eebf59dca42b2968bd0cf9620f685.pdf (accessed 28th August 2023)

less than 14 years old".²⁵ The commission also stated that "abductors commonly coerced their victims into overstating their age and claiming that they converted to Islam and married willingly. In many cases, courts accepted this testimony and granted custody to the abductor."²⁶

While this practice was denied outright in certain interviews, the delegation met with survivors, their families, lawyers, and saw court documents. The APPG is confident that the practice is widespread, and that stronger action is needed by the Pakistan state. One interview with a lawyer representing a number of victims of this crime put the number at five a week.

The APPG was pleased to hear that acceptance of this as an issue has come a long way since the 2018 delegation. The National Assembly recognised widespread abduction and forced marriage are problems and commented on the impact of international pressure from other states who continually raised the issue through diplomatic channels.

The newly established National Minorities Commission stated that "the forced conversion of young girls was a major issue that was being echoed globally."²⁷ The commission's recommended legislation was introduced to criminalise forced conversion. The APPG was saddened to hear that in October 2021, a parliamentary committee rejected the Anti-Forced Conversion bill after the Ministry of Religious Affairs opposed the legislation.²⁸

The APPG notes that the UK sanctioned cleric Mian Abdul Haq over his responsibility for the forced conversions and marriages of girls and women from religious minorities. We welcome the news that Mian Abdul Haq was added to the Global Human Rights Sanctions Regulations (2020) and encourage the UK to suggest the step to allies who have similar Magnitsky style legislation.

The delegation heard from the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, who shared the findings of their report published the week the delegation arrived, titled "A Breach of Faith: Freedom of Religion or Belief in 2021-22."²⁹ The report details the widespread abduction, forced marriage, and forced conversion of women and girls in 2022. Detailing how perpetrators can easily circumvent the law, the Commission makes the case for urgent legislation to criminalise forced conversion, warning that a lack of action will "continue to foster a climate of impunity for perpetrators...allowing the already-narrow space for religious freedom to shrink even further"³⁰.

²⁵ <https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2022-04/2022%20Pakistan.pdf>

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ <https://mora.gov.pk/NewsDetail/Y2I4NTJlZjEtOGUxMi00OGY3LWJkZDAtMTA2Y2FmYzU1YjI0>

²⁸ <https://www.rferl.org/a/pakistan-hindu-brides-conversion-sindh/31205637.html>

²⁹ A Breach of Faith: Freedom of Religion or Belief in 2021-22, The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, <https://hrcp-web.org/hrcpweb/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/2023-A-breach-of-faith-freedom-of-religion-or-belief-in-2021-22.pdf> (accessed 29th August 2023)

³⁰ Ibid

The British High Commission highlighted the fact that there are few legal avenues available to parents when a child is kidnapped. A national helpline to assist victims on issues of forced conversion, such as the current helpline assisting victims of gender-based violence (GBV), was recommended.

Several interviewees identified the need for the creation of safe spaces for girls who are forcefully converted.

The delegation met with lawyers representing survivors of this abuse. During this interview they identified difficulties parents face when seeking help from the authorities. Police may refuse to investigate, or a judge may rule there was no abduction if the girl is able to leave the house. This practice fails to protect victims of grooming or cohesive control and implies that victims can consent to abuse.

The APPG recognise there has been some acceptance by authorities in Pakistan about the reality of the abductions and forced marriages of women and girls from minority communities. We praise the effort of the international community, NGOs and lawyers who have tirelessly advocated for this issue. We urge authorities in Pakistan to implement legal safeguards and create safe spaces for victims.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Misuse of blasphemy laws: *Blasphemy laws have been used in vindictive and malicious ways.*

Recommendations:

- That the government of Pakistan should not enact the Criminal Laws Amendment Bill 2023, which seeks to make the Blasphemy laws stricter, by raising the punishment for committing blasphemy against the companions of the Prophet of Islam from 3 years to 10 years.
- Review Sections 295(A), (B) and (C) of the blasphemy laws and ensure procedural amendments are implemented to minimise the abuse of these laws in the short term, moving towards full repeal in the long term.

Employment: *Minorities face discrimination in recruitment and labour rights at work, and Christians are over-represented in sewage work and under-represented in other fields.*

Recommendations:

- Review the minorities quotas in place to ensure they are being met, enabling equal access to employment.

Education: *Religious minorities face discrimination in education which is holding children back from reaching their potential and holding the Pakistani economy back.*

Recommendations:

- Urge the government of Pakistan to review educational curriculum and teaching materials and ensure that discrimination and hate speech is removed from the syllabus and textbooks.
- Review the Single National Curriculum and ensure that it respects and recognises the rights and contributions of religious minority communities in Pakistan.
- Consider removing religious content from non-religious subjects, as per instructions from the Supreme Court's One-Man Commission, which is mandatory for all to study, including religious minorities.

Forced marriages/abductions: *Women and girls from minority backgrounds are victims of abductions, rape, and "forced marriage." Perpetrators need to be brought to justice and safe routes for women and girls to return to their families need to be established.*

Recommendations:

- Require a birth certificate to be verified in order for a marriage to take place.
- Ensure implementation of the Hindu Marriage Bill and Punjab Sikh and Marriage Act 2018

- Fund safe houses for females who have suffered abduction and/or rape and have fled from their captor.
- Legislation to hold the marriage officiator accountable for forced conversion marriages and making them face prison sentences for doing so.

Freedom to worship: *Religious minorities face significant danger and discrimination in worshipping, particularly Ahmadi Muslims, despite freedom to worship being a constitutional right for all.*

Recommendations:

- The Pakistan Government should reassert the right to worship by providing security for places of worship and public support by political leaders for freedom of religion.
- End the violence by police and mobs against Ahmadi Muslim mosques.
- Prosecute and bring to trial without delay all those responsible for committing violent attacks against minorities and other vulnerable groups.
- UK Government to ban hate preachers so they cannot travel to the UK.

Access to justice: *People accused of misuse of blasphemy laws, including but not limited to religious minorities, are not required to quote the alleged blasphemy. They also face reluctance from lawyers to take on their case and reluctance from judges to pass a verdict against the alleged blasphemy due to prejudice and fear.*

Recommendations:

- Conduct police training to improve how they assess FoRB violations.
- Train judges so that they act impartially and without prejudice during court proceedings.
- Ensure accurate recording of incidents that are updated regularly with any new developments.
- Release all prisoners of conscience.

Access to basic services: *Religious minorities in designated residential colonies do not have access to education, water, and sanitation services.*

Recommendations:

- As the third largest aid donor to Pakistan, ensure that all UK aid is administered in a way that it is not used to promote hatred or discriminate based on religion or belief, and introduce reporting mechanisms to monitor this commitment.
- Fund improved sanitation in areas with high numbers of minority religious or belief communities.

Other Recommendations:

- The One-Man Commission and the National Commission for Human Rights need to be funded, as necessary, in order to enable it to further its legal obligations more effectively.
- End the abhorrent practice of desecration of Ahmadi Muslim mosques and graves by police, the authorities and mobs by prosecuting the perpetrators.
- Repeal Ordinance XX and the Second Amendment to the Constitution of Pakistan.
- Repeal the blasphemy laws which are disproportionately targeted at members of religious minorities.
- Grant Ahmadi Muslims their civic rights such as the right to vote by ensuring all citizens are included in a single electoral list as part of the join electorate.
- Highlight the case for urgent legislation to protect victims of forced conversions.
- Return nationalised schools back to the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community.
- End the publication ban against Ahmadi Muslims in Punjab and misuse of the PECA (Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act) cyber laws that are being used to censor peaceful online content of religious minorities.