



“The blasphemy law is absolutely obscene” **A Christian woman Sentenced to Death**



Aasia, victim of blasphemy law

November 11, 2010: The sword of the blasphemy law keeps on slaughtering the Christian community in Pakistan.

This time, the victim is a woman, mother of five children. A court in Sheikhpura, sentenced her to death, the first such conviction of a woman. This conviction has sparked protests from the Christian community.



Christians protesting against the verdict

Ms. Aasia Bibi, 45, a resident of Nankana, Sheikhpura district. Her case, according to the media reports, dates back to 2009. It all started when she went to fetch water while working in the fields, but a group of Muslim women objected. A few days later, the local women with the help of a local cleric registered a case against her under the blasphemy law, and the local police opened an investigation.

Later, she was arrested and prosecuted under section 295 C of the Pakistan Penal Code, which carries the death penalty.

According to the media, Sentencing her to hang, Judge Naveed Iqbal “totally ruled out” any chance that Aasia was falsely implicated and said there were “no mitigating circumstances”.

Asia’s husband Ashiq Masih, 51 said that he would appeal her death sentence, which needs to be upheld by the Lahore high court before it can be carried out.

According to ‘The News Int’l, Nov, 12’, the Human Right activists want the controversial legislation repealed, saying it is exploited for personal enmity and encourage extremism.



Christian community protesting

“The blasphemy law is absolutely obscene and needs to be repealed in totality”, Human Rights Watch spokesman Ali Dayan Hasan told AFP. “It is primarily used against vulnerable groups that face social and political discrimination. Heading the category are religious minorities and heterodox Sects,” he said --- AFP.

The Peshawar Diocese also strongly condemned the verdict, demanded justice, and release of the lady.



(Courtesy ‘The News Int’l, 13 Nov 2010’)

Burney condemns blasphemy case verdict

Karachi: United Nations Expert Adviser on Human Rights Ansar Burney has strongly condemned the verdict of the district court of Sheikhpura on Monday to sentence a Christian woman to death on blasphemy charges, says a press release.

He requested superior courts to take suo moto action against the verdict of the Sheikhpura district court to provide justice to the lady and release her without any further delay.

Ansar Burney said the family members of Aasia were now receiving death threats and that it would also be worth noting that as many as 10 innocent non-Muslims lost their lives by being murdered while still on trial in Pakistan.

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www.peshawardiocese.org
Contact us at
frontiernews@peshawardiocese.org
commdeskdp@gmail.com

Thanksgiving & Prayer Requests



Diocese of Peshawar is grateful to God for His blessings and Mercies and also to the Partners for their financial and prayer support.

Please also pray for;

1. Kindly remember the people affected by the deadly monsoon rains and floods and for the Diocesan Relief & Rescue efforts for the victims of this natural disaster.
2. The War on Terror is still going on, kindly pray for those who are determined to eradicate this menace for good.
3. We need your prayer support for those who are living in hostile areas of NWFP, especially the Pakistani Christians and their institutions.
4. The Diocesan Relief Work in Pateka, Balakot. May God help the Diocese to work more effectively for the development of the Earthquake victims.

Special Prayer requests;

1. Please remember Pakistan and especially the minorities as they are facing the daily scarcity of flour and other food commodities; the prices have gone extremely high.
2. Military operation against the Taliban in South Waziristan is at its full swing. Thousands of people have evacuated the area and are getting themselves registered as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in D.I. Khan and Bannu.

(Inter-Faith Column)

“Rights are not given, but taken”

The ‘Inter-Faith’ Conference



Members of the Faith Friends

30 October, 2010: The world Council of Religions (Faith Friends) every now and then holds Inter-Faith seminars, involving groups of professionals belonging to various fields. In the recent past, it organized two seminars, one with Media personnel and the other with Women.

This October, the Faith Friends organized a seminar involving the Lawyers Community, which is the most vibrant group of professionals, and has a platform of its own to raise voice over legislative issues. The theme of this seminar was “Rights of the non-Muslim Pakistanis”.

This seminar highlighted the legal and legislative difficulties faced by the minorities in obtaining ‘equal rights’. A large number of prominent lawyers, various religious community leaders, and prominent citizens from all walks of life participated in this seminar. Mr. Shahab Khattak, President, Lawyers Awami Party, was the chief guest.

Prof. Dr. Qibla Ayaz (a Muslim scholar), an executive member of the ‘Faith Friends’ welcomed the guests, and briefed them about aims & objectives of the Faith Friends. In his speech he said, “The World has become a ‘Global Village’, thus there is a greater need to build positive relationships with the people of various faiths, all over the world. “The Faith Friends keeps on promoting ‘Religious harmony’ through seminars and personal interaction with people and leaders of various faiths”, he added.

The Speakers viewed that all the Religions are about Peace and Justice, and that our duty is to protect the rights of the fellow citizens.

Mr. Shoukat Ghulam, a prominent Christian lawyer, in his speech said, “Christianity is a religion of Peace, and

through Inter-faith dialogue we can all promote religious harmony, especially these days, as terrorism and sectarian violence is on the rise in society”.



Mr. Shoukat Ghulam addressing the Conference

He also mentioned that services of the Christian community in Pakistan are broadly acknowledged by fellow citizens, especially, in the field of Health, Education and Social Work, but various Christian community members are also prominent for their services in the field of ‘Judiciary’ as well. Justice Cornelius was an icon of the Judiciary, everybody, ever after his death remembers him as a man of principals, and an upright Judge of the Supreme Court of Pakistan.

Similarly, the leader of Hindu Community, Mr. Haroon Sarb Diyal, and Mr. Charan Jeet Singh, the leader of the Sikh Community, mentioned that both the Hindus and Sikhs living in Pakistan are equal citizens of the country, but their basic legal rights have always been denied. They mentioned that they even do not have the laws regarding Marriage, Divorce and Inheritance, according to their own religions.

“Hopefully, the lawyers community can play their part to end this legal and legislative discrimination against them.” They said.



Mrs. Reena Patrick of Peshawar Diocese

Mrs. Reena Patrick, the Women Coordinator, Peshawar Diocese, in her speech highlighted the problems faced by the women in society, and need for equal rights for women & children of the minorities in Pakistan.

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(Development & Relief Sector)

Diocesan Relief Work for the Flood Victims



Diocesan D & R staff in action

The Diocesan Development & Relief Sector in the first Phase rescued the flood affected people, and provided them emergency aid for survival. Now, the second phase of the project is in progress, i.e. Relief work, which will be followed by the reconstruction and rehabilitation work for the flood affectees.



Relief distribution in progress

In this phase, the Diocese is providing Food & non-Food items. The Food items include; rice, flour, milk, sugar, pulses, cooking oil, tea, biscuits and drinking water etc. Whereas, the Non-food items include crockery, pots & dishes, water-coolers & bottles, gas-cylinders (fuel) & stoves, clothes, mats, mattresses, mosquito-nets, beds; plus, soaps, towels, tooth brushes and other 'personal hygiene' items etc.



The Diocesan Medical Team

Now a days, the distribution is in progress in Tank, Charsadda, Tarnab, Risalpur, Nowshera, and Hassan Gari (Peshawar). The people of these areas were much thankful to the Diocese and its Partners for helping them in the time of crisis.

Apart from the food & non-food items, the Diocese is also looking after the Health needs of the flood victims. It regularly holds free medical camps, and the patients are provided free medical check-ups, tests and medicines.

In addition, various teams of health workers create awareness about preventive measures against the possible out-breaks of the various diseases in the community.

The Church Chaplains, also visit the flood affectees and hold prayer meetings to fulfill their spiritual needs as well, thus keeping their faith alive in the mankind, and in God.

Assessment carried out for the Construction Work



View of a damaged house in Tarnab Farm

This summer, the monsoon rains caused unimaginable damage to life and property. The Peshawar Diocese's rescue, relief and health teams provided all the possible help and assistance to the flood victims.

Now, the most crucial phase, i.e. reconstruction and rehabilitation, needs to be started. It's a bit lengthy process, as houses of many Christian families have been washed away, some were completely damaged, whereas, the others were partially destroyed. In some areas, the whole infrastructure has been washed away.

Many people are still living in tents, a few are residing with their relatives. Thus anxiously waiting to return, and reconstruct their lives.

The Peshawar Diocese's Development & Relief Sector has already assessed the amount of the damage done in Charsadda, Tarnab, Risalpur, Nowshera, Jehingira, Akora, Khairabad and Hassan Gari (Peshawar).

Now, the Diocese will put forth all its efforts to raise funds for the construction, reconstruction, and/or renovation of the damaged houses. It's an uphill task. Kindly, remember us in your prayers, as it can move mountains.

Partners Visit the Flood Victims

The 'Diocese of Peshawar' with the cooperation and support of its friends and partners from all over the world, embarked upon an emergency Relief & Rescue programme for the victims of the deadly monsoon rains and flash floods in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province.



Mr. Sandy distributing aid among flood victims

Mr. Sandy Sneddon from the Church of Scotland, Mr. Wilson Saraj from Barnabas Fund – UK, and Mr. Lawrence Hedelund from Dan Mission – Denmark visited Peshawar Diocese and went to see the flood affected areas, and met the affectees. They also visited various other Diocesan programmes/projects for the flood victims and appreciated the Diocesan efforts.



Bishop Humphrey and Mr. Lawrence visiting the flood victims

These Good-will visits by our Church-Partners/donors are a source of encouragement for the Diocese and its Workers, and consolation for the flood victims.



Mr. Wilson Saraj among the flood victims

Acknowledgements are due to all our friends, partners and honourable guests for their continuous support and help.

(Education Sector)

Dr. Pennell's Birthday**Students of the Primary Section**

Every year, the Pennell High School, Bannu celebrates the birthday of its founder, Dr. T.L. Pennell. This is an old tradition to commemorate the services of a great Missionary, Physician and an Educationist. The staff and students made special arrangements to mark his 144th birthday.

This year, the Primary section of the school was given the honour to organize all the formal and informal activities. First, a cake cutting ceremony was held, and later, a 'Spelling Competition' was held among the students of class III – V. Earlier, the staff and students gathered in the Assembly Hall of the school, and the programme was officially started with prayers.

The top 10 students from each section participated in this competition, and the winners were awarded with trophies, whereas, the others were given the 'certificates of participation'.

**The Principal distributing awards**

The Officiating Principal of the school, Mr. Fredrick Farhan Dass in his speech highlighted the character and personality traits of the Dr. T.L. Pennell, and said, "He was an obedient son and a hardworking student". He also mentioned that he was a gold medalist of the prestigious Royal College of London, UK. He advised the students to follow the footsteps of the founding father of the School.

In his speech, he also acknowledged the hardwork and efforts of the Primary Section, who made excellent arrangements and entertained everybody.

School Visit

Pennell High School, Bannu

**The Director inspecting school classes**

The Additional Director of Education, Mrs. Naseem Dass, paid a visit to the Pennell High School, Bannu, on 6 October 2010. The Principal and staff of the school gave her a warm welcome. It was followed by the class wise visits, from Prep to Class 10.

The director observed that the classes were neatly decorated, students were very much disciplined and well behaved, and that the Teachers were working hard.

**The Director interacting with school children**

The Director also paid a visit to the playgroup section of the school. In her remarks, she said, "It was a wonderful sight to be at". "The children aged, 3 to 3 ½ were dressed in colourful cloths, they sang songs, rhymes and showed their phonetics skills". She added.

She also inspected the school library, of each section. "The main section is equipped with two computer laboratories and has all the necessary equipment for carrying out practical". She informed.

The Director in her address said, "The credit goes to the administrative staff, Principal, and the skillful teaching staff". She also appreciated the managerial abilities of the Principal Mr. Fredrick Dass and his team. She hoped that the school will further flourish under his leadership.

Religious Education for Minorities**Minority students should be taught their own 'religious education'**

On 13 October 2010, a meeting of various denominations was held at St. John's school. The members of the Catholic Church, the Presbyterian, Salvation army, Church of Pakistan, and the Political leadership (MPA's) belonging to various religious minorities participated in this meeting.

Purpose of this gathering was to introduce Catechism (Masihi Taleem) in lieu of Ethics as a subject for Christian students, whereas, it was demanded that the other religious minority students should be taught their own 'religious education'.

The same delegation met the Minister of Education, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) Province. Mr. Sardar Hussain Babak, and the very next day, i.e. 14 October 2010 had a meeting at the Civil Secretariat to discuss the above mentioned issue. He welcomed the delegation whole heartedly, and assured them all the possible cooperation he could extend in this regard.

The same day, the Minister of Minorities affairs, KPK, Mr. Nemroz Khan also assured the delegation of the government's support and cooperation, as well.

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Inter-Faith Conference

The chief guest Mr. Shahab Khattak, in his speech also stressed the need to promote Inter-faith, and assured that the lawyers community will raise its voice for equal rights for the minorities, as well.

He also announced that the lawyers community will fully support the minorities in the court of law. "We will not allow any discriminatory laws used against minorities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and in Pakistan. "As Rights are not given, but taken", he added.

It is worth mentioning that the Diocese of Peshawar took this initiative to form the 'Faith Friends'.