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CHRISTIANS IN PAKISTAN ARE A PERSECUTED CLASS

The Collins' Dictionary defines persecution as: "The cruel and unfair treatment of a person or group, especially because of their religious or political beliefs, or their race". Persecution or cruel and unfair treatment can have many shades. The majority or the powerful group/class may persecute the weaker minority group through psychological or mental torture. The cruel or unfair treatment can also be expressed through physical violence as happens in most of the cases in Pakistan.

Part A: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Pakistan is a religious state, created from the subcontinent of India in 1947. The founder of Pakistan, Mohammed Ali Jinnah, said in his inaugural speech that everyone was free to go to their place of worship. But the very name of the new state **ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF PAKISTAN** says it all. Muslim citizens form an overwhelming majority and are the rulers of the country. The Government of Pakistan's National Database & Registration Authority (NADRA) 2012 reports that there are 1.9 % Christians in Pakistan. Alarming, more and more Christians are fleeing their homeland if given a chance.

Whatever the exact figure of the population of Christians in Pakistan may be currently, one thing is clear, i.e. the Christians have been reduced to a very small minority. Since they do not follow the mainstream religion of Islam, they are subject to human rights violations. They are a weak class economically, academically and socially. A large number of Christians work as cleaners, brick-kiln workers or menial job laborers. There are very few Christians who succeed in breaking the chains of poverty and misery to get jobs in civil and military services, engineering, health, education in the state or the private sector.

THE BLASPHEMY LAW OF PAKISTAN

Discrimination and injustice have become extreme. It has resulted in the notoriously dangerous and much feared Blasphemy Law.

"Pakistan has the most notorious blasphemy laws in the world—which have been used disproportionately against religious minorities. Pakistani Christians make up only 1.5 percent of the total population, but over a quarter (187) of the 702 blasphemy cases registered between 1990 and 2014 were against Christians".

January 16, 2018, Lindy Lowry in [Asia; Stories of Persecution](#)



he Blasphemy Law of Pakistan (295 A, B, C) has become a callously legal and deadly weapon in the hands of an Islamic mob. The mob can lynch and kill anybody anywhere after accusing a person of blaspheming against the Prophet of Islam or burning of Quranic pages. The Islamic theology is that anyone desecrating The Book (Quran), The Prophet or Islamic theology, must be killed. All the Muslim believers are required through a religious verdict called 'fatwa', to reach the place immediately where the accused is located and ensure that he/she is killed forthwith. According to the 'fatwa', all who participate in this murderous act will be awarded an honourable status of pride not only in this life but in life after death. Anyone who refuses to comply with the fatwa will be declared a sinner to be burnt in the everlasting fire of hell.

The Islamic theology places so much force and power in the Blasphemy Law that nobody dares to fiddle with this dreadful legal clause of the constitution. Shahbaz Bhatti, Pakistan's Federal Minister for Minority Affairs, tried to criticize the law. He was brutally murdered despite all the special security normally provided to a sitting minister of state. Salman Taseer, the Governor of Lahore, Punjab, was assassinated by his police security guard. Salman's only mistake was that he visited Aasia Bibi, a blasphemy accused person, in her death cell in prison. By killing Salman Taseer and Shahbaz Bhatti, the Islamists wanted to give the message that they would not spare anyone who sympathises with a blasphemy accused person. There is no mercy and forgiveness for a blasphemy accused and for his/her sympathizers.

Everyone in Pakistan including the parliamentarians, judges, military generals or senior civil officers and even the mullahs are scared of tampering with The Blasphemy Law. Death haunts the blasphemy accused person in whichever corner of Pakistan he/she tries to hide. The Islamist mafia, deadly by nature, chases the blasphemy accused and kills him/her to win honour from Allah in heaven.

Meher Tarar of **Express Tribune**, in her article of November 14, 2014 writes the tragic story of Shehzad and Shama who were burnt alive by a frenzied mob. Shehzad and Shama were accused of desecrating The Quran.

"Crouched inside a small, sparsely furnished, poorly-lit room, voices could be heard from outside, voices that had distorted into a snarling, indecipherable noise that grew by the moment. Their fates were sealed, and no wall — leave alone the mostly



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mud wall of the room, their sanctuary against the roar of the mob outside — would keep them shielded for long. As the roof splintered after constant blows, they were dragged outside by more hands than they could count. And abused, shouted at by so many that it all became one screeching, deafening commotion. Their bodies, malnourished, abused by years of labour, were dragged so mercilessly that it was a miracle their limbs did not come apart. Their pleas, their wails, were all in vain. The verdict of doom had been declared.

The venue: Chak 59, Kot Radha Kishan, District Kasur, Punjab, Pakistan. The spectacle: a mob of thousands against a Christian couple. The charge: alleged desecration of the Holy Quran. [The investigation-trial-sentencing: all by the mob, from the mob, for the mob.](#)

Shama, 24, and Shahzad Masih, 26, were brutalized by a frenzied crowd who, after tearing their clothes, breaking their bones, dragging them across the village, threw them in the burning furnace of the brick kiln where the latter worked. Shama, a mother of three, was four months pregnant. Shama, eyewitnesses say, was wearing clothes that did not burn easily, so her clothes were torn off her, and she was wrapped into cotton: cotton burns easily. And she had to be burnt. The mob had decided.

[Their six-year-old son told the media](#) about the hell that no child, no grown-up, is meant to witness. That many, many people beat up his *amma*, *abba*. That his *amma*, *abba* were tied behind a tractor and dragged through the village before they were burnt.

[The Bonded Labour System \(Abolition\) Act, 1992 of Pakistan](#) be damned, Shahzad, like the estimated 4.5 million indentured labourers (as per the Bonded Labour Liberation Front Pakistan), had his time, blood, family, and even life tethered to the brick kiln, where he worked for peanuts. And a loss of self. This case is about the millions of those — countless of whom are children — who are forced to rent their valueless existence on a lifelong lease to influential men who not only build assets but also an army of faceless, nameless people who toil for them for a pittance for life. Think of leaving: you will be accused of one thing or the other

and will pay a price. Sometimes, with your life. As in the case of Shama and Shahzad.

Allegedly, a few pages of the Holy Quran were found outside the couple's house. The village clergy were informed, and before asking the 'culprits' for any explanation, the atrocity had been announced through loudspeakers, the rage fanned, and the hysteria suitably orchestrated. This was worse than Salem in 1692; here, there was no pretence of a trial. No questions were asked, and no answers were required. The elimination of the 'undesirables' had to be carried out".

Meher Tarar ends her article with the words:

"Will justice be done to Shama and Shahzad? Will there be closure for their families who are, so far, unable to even have a burial for them? How do you bury a few charred bones? Will there be any solace for the couple's children who saw them go through hell on earth? Until then, I have no 'Rest-in-Peace' for Shama and Shahzad. It feels too little, and too much like a lie to me".

Meher Tarar is a former op-ed editor of The Daily Times and a freelance columnist. She can be reached on twitter at @MehrTarar

Part B: ATTITUDES OF MUSLIMS TOWARDS CHRISTIANS

SOCIAL OUTCASTS

The Muslims call Christians "Choorhas" which is a derogatory & pejorative term used for washroom cleaners. Even if a Christian is promoted as a Major General in Pakistan Armed Forces, he/she will be known among the public as the "Choorha General".

Lindy Lawry of Open Doors has highlighted the deadly results of blasphemy law of Pakistan:

In her report of January 16, 2018, **Lindy Lawry** narrates the tragic story of the death of a 17-year-old boy, Sharoon Masih. The title of Lindy's story is:

"KILLED OVER A CUP OF WATER-IN PAKISTAN, CHRISTIANS ARE THE 'UNTOUCHABLE' CASTE".

Lindy Lawry writes that Sharoon "had been beaten to death in his classroom by another student, Raza — because Sharoon was thirsty and had drunk from the same cup of water as his Muslim classmates". she adds that Sharoon was "hated 'because of his religion'.

Lindy Lawry also mentioned another case of hatred in the same article: "Two months before Sharoon's death, a Christian sewerage worker in Pakistan's Sindh Province died after three doctors refused to touch him during Ramadan (the Islamic holy month), because they saw him as unclean".

RJ (Name withheld for safety reasons) is a Canadian national and an ex-commissioned officer of Pakistan Army. When he was posted as Commanding Officer of his Armoured Corps unit, it was one of his duties to visit and check the kitchen and dining room of his service men. On the very first day, the moment he was about to take a morsel from the dish that was brought to him for inspection, one of the service men shouted: "Don't let him touch the dish. He is a choorha. The food will get unclean." **RJ** got so shocked to hear such insulting comments full of hatred and prejudice that he immediately pulled his hand back. **RJ** faced so many personal experiences where he felt psychologically and mentally persecuted to the extent that finally he tendered his resignation and migrated to Canada to live in peace as a citizen where he felt he was respected as a human being.

RJ can be reached through the CSIOC email: info-jc@csioc.ca

GY (Name withheld for safety reasons) was employed as a Technical Communication Expert (TCE) in Pakistan Communication Corporation (PCC). The Technical Expert in a state authority is a very prestigious and lucrative appointment. But **GY** met with some very disappointing and humiliating incidents. He was eating lunch at a roadside restaurant one day. Because of his dark skin color, the waiter asked him about his religion. The moment he told him that he was Christian, there was a commotion in the restaurant. The waiter reported the matter to the manager who asked **GY** to pay not only for the meal but also for the utensils he used. The manager asked the waiter to take the utensils outside, break them into pieces and throw them in the garbage. The waiter did exactly as he was instructed by the owner, breaking and throwing the utensils right in front of **GY**. With tears in eyes, **GY** left the place. He felt so humiliated that he decided that very day to leave the country and settle where he will be treated as a respectable citizen with equal rights. He migrated and settled in Canada.

GY can be reached through the CSIOC email: info-jc@csioc.ca

Pakistan's history is so profusely replete with incidents of hatred towards Christians that all such stories cannot be accommodated in a short and brief report. Nevertheless, these incidents do indicate the prevalent negative attitude of the Muslims against Christians in Pakistan.

PHYSICAL VIOLENCE:

Social media, news media, and internet are loaded with material indicating how minorities, especially the Christians and Ahmedia communities, are treated by the majority Muslim communities in Pakistan. Violence against Christians is rampant throughout the country. It has become very common to read about these atrocities: Christian church or a school burning; suicide bomber exploding himself in a park where Christians were celebrating Easter, or a Christian girl has been forcibly converted to Islam and married to a Muslim.

Lindy Lawry of **The Open Doors** says that: "In Pakistan numbering 196.7 million people, the main source of persecution is Islamic oppression, with violence against Christians scoring 99.8 on the country's persecution profile. Much of the Christian persecution comes from radical Islamic groups that flourish under the favour of political parties, the army and the government. These **radical Islamic groups run thousands of *madrasas* (Islamic education centres) where youth are taught and encouraged to persecute religious minorities like Christians**".

Lindy has also mentioned other cases of persecution:

- "Three weeks before Sharoon's death, a 16-year-old illiterate Christian boy was forced to confess to blasphemy to escape mob violence in Gujranwala, 217 miles northeast of Vehari.
- Last July, a 16-year-old Christian hospital cleaner near Gujrat, just north of Gujranwala, was charged with blasphemy after getting into a conversation with colleagues.
- Last April, a Muslim student was lynched by a mob at a university in the northern city of Mardan for "sharing blasphemous content on Facebook," an allegation that later proved wrong.

"The murder of Sharoon Masih exemplifies **how extreme, hostile and intolerant radical Islam can be**, says Open Doors' Wybo Nicolai, director of external services".

Physical violence is extreme, resulting in death.

The story of Patras and Sajid Masih

The story of Patras and Sajid Masih is an extreme case of police brutalities towards Christians accused of the Blasphemy Law. During police investigation Patras and Sajid were brutally tortured by the investigating officers. The investigating officers asked Sajid to remove Patras' trousers and do oral sex with him. Sajid had no choice left but to jump from the 4th floor of the police office located in the city of Lahore, Punjab. He survived, suffering multiple serious injuries from which he is still trying to recover while in hiding. Patras, though a minor, is in adult jail. Their case was widely publicized in authentic local and international media.

Lindy Lawry, in her article, has drawn attention to the famous case of Aasiya Bibi: **"Eight years after she was first arrested, the Christian Pakistani woman Aasia Bibi still remains on death row for blasphemy, after she offered a cup of water to fellow workers in a field on a hot day. Two Muslims refused to take the cup, saying she had made it 'unclean" simply through her religion and caste"**. Aasia Bibi has been acquitted of her death sentence in a landmark decision by the Supreme Court of Pakistan on October 31, 2018. The Supreme Court's decision was marked by nationwide protests by fundamentalist political parties violently ransacking the public and private properties causing national loss of billions of dollars. The Islamist parties have vowed to kill anyone associated with her acquittal: her lawyer, the Supreme Court judges, the Army, the Prime Minister.

Update on Aasia Bibi's Case

The case of **Aasia Bibi** has gained worldwide attention about the **horrendous Blasphemy Law** in Pakistan. Even after she was acquitted by the Supreme Court of Pakistan, she was kept under protection of the Armed Forces because the Government could not trust the civilian security agencies. There were uncontrollable nationwide protests of arson and destruction of state properties. The religious extremists gave a warning to the Government of serious repercussions if Aasia were to be pardoned. In Islam there is no forgiveness for a person accused of blasphemy against Islam or its prophet. Aasia Bibi and her entire family has been given refuge in Canada very

discretely. The religious extremists have vowed that they will not spare her life wherever she goes.

ECONOMIC DEPRIVATION

According to **Usman Ahmed**, the economic conditions of Pakistani Christians are a major setback in the security and safety. "The economic condition of Christians is another significant roadblock to justice. "A large number of Christians are some of the poorest citizens of Pakistan - with them being janitorial staffers, sweepers, brick kiln workers, landless farm workers and domestic workers. Job advertisements asking for Christians to apply for positions of sweepers in government offices is a historical norm," says Usman Ahmed. "Their poverty definitely makes Christians more vulnerable to forced marriage and violence and hinders them from proper legal representation."

SA (Name withheld for safety reasons), a Christian educationist, was posted by the Director of Education, Rawalpindi, to teach History at Government Postgraduate College, Rawalpindi. When **SA** presented his credentials at the college, the Principal refused to accept him on the grounds that **SA** was a Christian. This was the attitude of the head of an elite educational institution. Please note that the Principal was a PhD from a foreign university. **SA** reported the matter to the Director of Education who showed his inability in resolving this problem on the plea that it was a very sensitive issue. **SA** is nowadays settled in the U.S. teaching in a prestigious institute.

SA can be reached through the CSIOC email: info-jc@csioc.ca

PSYCHOLOGICAL TORTURE

The following incident was narrated by **Rauf Clasra** in his TV program aired on Channel 92. **Rauf Clasra** is a very senior and leading journalist of Pakistan. Rauf said that he had an opportunity to speak privately to three young female students who came to his TV channel program. The three students stood out amongst the hundreds because they were Christians at the famous FJ State University of Rawalpindi, Pakistan. Rauf asked the girls if they had any problem in the university. The girls said that everything was fine except that the entire faculty and the students of the university seemed to be duty bound to convert them to Islam. **Rauf Clasra** said that his head was down with shame at the attitude of Pakistani educationists. He said that his two sons were studying in a college in UK but nobody ever asked them about their religion or tried to proselytize them.

Rauf Clasra, a prominent spokesperson of Minorities in Pakistan, has also brought up the case of Muqqaddus, a girl student of ninth grade in a Government School of Hazor, District of Attock. The parents of the student complained to the District Administration regarding the discriminatory attitude of the class teacher who hated Muqqaddus and did everything to degrade her because she is Christian. The teacher told the girl that since she was Christian, she must leave the school.



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When the District Administration approached the school, instead of reprimanding the teacher, they transferred the girl to the evening session.

Rauf Klasra can be reached through: jaysalklasra@gmail.com or www.twitter.com/KlasraRauf

CS (Name withheld for safety reasons) was an undergraduate Christian student at an elite girls' college of Rawalpindi, Pakistan. She complained to her father that the Principal of the college, during one of her College's General Assembly address, advised the students to always follow Quranic verse 5:51 which says: "Do not be friends with Christians and Jews." CS was very disturbed. She felt very lonely and helpless because nothing could be done to undo the kind of hateful and negative attitude the head of the institution was inculcating in the psyche of the students.

CS can be reached through the CSIOC email: info-jc@csioc.ca

In its report of May 22, 2017, **Dawn newspaper** quotes the comments of a Christian shopkeeper: "Muslims can't see a Christian progress, get a good education and a good job' — this is a fact, complains **Pervaiz Jazbi**, a 37-year-old Christian shopkeeper in Islamabad".

UNTOUCHABLE CASTE

Lindy Lawry states that "The Masih family is among the estimated 3.9 million Christians in Pakistan (#5 on the 2018 World Watch List #WWL2018) persecuted for their faith in Jesus. In the Central Asian country, Christians are often treated with contempt. **To Muslims, Christians come from a downtrodden "untouchable caste."** Many Muslims refuse to drink and eat with them for fear of being defiled".

NO PLACE FOR NON-MUSLIMS IN PAKISTAN

The Dawn newspaper writes in its report of May 22, 2017 the story of an Ahmadi from Balochistan: "When a Balochistan resident identified himself as Ahmadi to census officials, they chased him out of the mosque where they had gathered families to be counted, Claimed Saleemuddin, a spokesman for the community, without identifying the man for safety reasons. Saleemuddin said the Ahmadi man who fled the Balochistan mosque became the target of a hate campaign, barred even from

buying food. "He fled with his family," Saleemuddin said. "He has been living in hiding ever since."

Part C: THE FATE OF PEOPLE WHO RETURN TO PAKISTAN:

CURRENT STATUS

Usman Ahmed, a British freelance writer has written a very comprehensive report about the plight of Christians in Pakistan. Usman Ahmed's article: "**Is Pakistan Safe for Christians?**" was published in **The South Asia Channel** of May 16, 2016. Writing about the Easter bombing of March 2016 Usman says: "These atrocities in Pakistan take place against a broader backdrop of increasing persecution of Christians throughout the world. A 2015 [Report](#) by Open Doors, a Christian advocacy watchdog group, claimed that the events of the past year represented "the most violent and sustained attack on the Christian faith in modern history." The report also found that 7,100 Christians were murdered because of their religion, while Pakistan ranked sixth on the list of countries in which Christians face the most severe persecution".

CLIMATE OF FEAR

Usman Ahmed has also brought up a very important cause of the pervasive fear in the minds of Pakistani Christian community:

" that the maltreatment of Christians in Pakistan is enhanced by militancy rather than driven by it. At an everyday level, the root causes of the anxieties of the community owe more to the actions of ordinary Pakistanis rather than terrorist outfits".

CHRISTIANS' IDENTIFICATION WITH UNITED STATES AND THE WEST

Usman Ahmed refers to another important factor of the Muslims' hostility towards Pakistani Christians:

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"Hostility to Christians has been further aggravated by a growing animosity towards the United States and the West, particularly as a consequence of the war on terror and continued drone strikes in Pakistani territory. In 2012, 80 percent of Pakistanis held unfavorable views of the United States. Though last year that came down to 59 percent, it still represents a plurality of people. Consequently, on account of their religious and cultural associations with countries like the United States where Christianity is the dominant religion, Christians have come to be seen as enemies of Pakistan. The storming of a Christian boys school in Peshawar last year in protest of the controversial cartoon published by the French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* is one example of the reactionary treatment of Pakistani Christians and resentment of Western views of Islam".

NEGATIVE ATTITUDE OF THE SECURITY AND LAW-ENFORCING AGENCIES

Usman Ahmed has highlighted the negative attitude of the security and law-enforcing agencies: "In the majority of cases, complaints are ignored by the police. For the ones that do make it to court, girls and women are pressured into testifying that their marriage was voluntary, often under the threat of recrimination towards their families or possible accusations of apostasy if they deviate from the prescribed testimony. Since victims often remain in their perpetrator's custody, their ability to bring evidence against the men who wronged them is extremely slim. There is a belief that because of these factors the extent of the problem is likely to be more conspicuous than the figures suggest, with many cases also going unreported"

FORCED MARRIAGES AND CONVERSION TO ISLAM

Usman Ahmed further adds that: "Taken together, these negative perceptions have created a combustible situation for the peace and security of Pakistan's Christian community. A measure of both their distress and how they are viewed by the mainstream Muslim population can be gauged from the horrific conditions with which Christians must contend on a day-to-day basis. The worst of these is forced marriage and conversion to Islam.

According to the "Forced Marriages and Inheritance Deprivation" report published by the Islamabad-based **Aurat Foundation**, between 100-700 Christian girls are



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forced into marriage and conversion to Islam every year. Unfortunately, this is often preceded by some form of sexual assault, as Pakistan has historically been one of the most dangerous countries on earth for women".

WHY FORCED MARRIAGES CANNOT BE STOPPED

Usman Ahmed has given reasons **why forced marriages cannot be stopped**. "With no national or provincial laws preventing forced conversion, this trend shows little sign of abating. This year, cases of this nature include that of 15-year-old Saima Bibi who was kidnapped in January by a group of men and forced to marry one of her captors".

FACTORS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST CHRISTIANS IN PAKISTAN

Usman Ahmed has very clearly mentioned in very simple language some other factors of discrimination against Christians in Pakistan. "There are many other non-violent forms of discrimination Christians endure, such as lack of employment opportunities, poor access to education, and barriers to social mobility that only add to Christian vulnerability. Views of Christians among some employers can be gauged by the fact that sanitation jobs, for example, are often advertised as open only to non-Muslims with Christians primarily in mind".

Part D: PAKISTAN, A FRONTLINE PLAYER IN PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS:

Usman Ahmed answers the question why Pakistan will remain a frontline player in persecution of Christians. "The ill-treatment of minorities, especially Christians, is a black mark against the wider Pakistani society. While terrorists may be the most violent agitators, it is public attitudes that mark minorities as major targets for militants. As Pakistan continues in the fight against extremism, it needs to understand that military solutions are not enough. **Killing of the militants might make the country a safer place overall, but it will have no bearing on the daily plight of those whose lives are lived in the framework of dehumanizing stereotypes.** Until these core fundamental tensions are resolved, the country will continue to be a frontline player in Christian persecution".

Usman Ahmed can be found on Twitter at @usmanahmed_iam

IS PAKISTAN SAFE FOR CHRISTIANS?

FATE OF REJECTED REFUGEE CLAIMANTS UPON RETURN TO PAKISTAN

Imagine the fate of those people who are sent back to Pakistan after their cases have been rejected in countries where they are seeking asylum. For example, The Canadian Immigration Department, very conveniently advises them to move to a safer location in Pakistan. The IRB has no knowledge of the real situation in Pakistan. The officials sitting in the IRB offices are totally unaware of the psyche of Pakistani Muslims. For Pakistani Muslims, their Prophet, the Quran, and everything related with their religion are above every other thing. A very senior judge of Pakistan's judiciary, while dealing with a case of blasphemy, said "It shall be a matter of great joy for me to sacrifice my wife and children to protect the honour and dignity of my prophet".

As has been mentioned in the beginning of this document since Pakistan was created in the name of Islam and Muslims religion remains the supreme authority. Several people tried to do away with the Blasphemy Law but lost their lives or had to flee Pakistan e.g. Salman Taseer and Shahbaz Bhatti.

Rejected refugee claimants, like those in Canada, who are waiting to be deported live in constant stress. They fear for their lives, of being hunted by the prevalent mob mentality upon their return to Pakistan.

The uncertainty of their future has led them to health problems and psychological stress. For example, claimants under treatment in Canada know for sure that these medical facilities and safe environment will not be available to them upon their return. Rejected refugee claimants, residing in Canada for some time, get used to a different style of life and environment. Most of them have health problems that require the persons to remain in Canada and get appropriate treatment. Returning them to Pakistan will be like forcing them back into a life of pain, torture, and possibly death.

The **CSIOC** has information from all over Pakistan. It has also observed the psychology of the Muslim population of the country with a very keen eye. It has seen the misery and painful plight of those asylum seekers who were forced back to Pakistan. There is no nook and corner safe for

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them. Their entire families remain under constant fear. The Blasphemy Law, the deadly fear of Islamist groups, the security agencies, poverty keep haunting them wherever they run.

The **CSIOC** also knows that IRB and the Canadian Government always keep the Canadian values of compassion and humanity as supreme deciding factor before sending a refugee claimant back to Pakistan. It is hoped that the Government of Canada together with IRB will review the cases of rejected refugee claimants and those who apply for **asylum on religious grounds** with compassion and sympathy.

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Document 2

Post-Deportation Risks and Monitoring of Asylum Seekers

Whenever one thinks of deportation of refugees or asylum seekers, two words immediately come to mind: “**refoulement and non-refoulement**”. The dictionary defines refoulement as “the forcible return of refugees or asylum seekers to a country where they are liable to be subjected to persecution”.

According to the documents of UNESCO:

“**Refoulement** means the expulsion of persons who have the right to be recognised as refugees. The principle of **non-refoulement** has first been laid out in 1954 in the UN-Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, which, in Article 33(1) provides that:

“No Contracting State shall expel or return ('refouler') a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.”

The UNESCO documents further say:

"It is important to note, that the principle of non-refoulement does not only forbid the expulsion of refugees to their country of origin but to any country in which they might be subject to persecution. The only possible exception provided for by the UN Convention is the case that the person to be expelled constitutes a danger to national security (Art 33(2)).¹

The UNESCO documents describe the problems with refoulment:

"Although the principle of non-refoulement is universally accepted, problems with refoulement frequently arise through the fact, that its application requires a recognized refugee status. However, not all countries are members to the UN Convention relating to the Status of Refugees or may not have established formal procedures for determining refugee status".

The deportation of asylum seekers or refugees to their countries of origin carries tremendous amounts of risks of various types. The deportees are, because of their social or political status, vulnerable people.

According to the report of the Refugee Studies Centre of the University of Oxford, the deportees are:

".... vulnerable and face considerable risks after deportation. **These risks include loss of belongings, lack of identity papers, homelessness, destitution, trauma, depression, suicide, extortion, detention, and inhumane and degrading treatment** - indicators that deportation in some cases may in fact constitute refoulement".

One very appalling post-deportation risk that has not been included in the report of the Refugees Studies Centre of the University of Oxford's list is the '**loss of life**' due to the inhumane and brutal manner in which deportees are treated by the state authorities in the country of their origin (Everybody knows that Aasia Bibi, the Pakistani Christian woman recently released from prison after staying in death cell for eight years, is likely to be killed if she ever returns or is forced back to Pakistan. She is reportedly in hiding, together with her family, under strict state safety & security custody. The fundamentalist political and religious parties have given nationwide calls for killing Aasia Bibi.

The nature of risks faced by deportees depends upon the political, cultural, religious and social atmosphere of the country where the asylum seeker is returned. In Middle Eastern and South-Asian countries the situation is different from the African countries. Pakistan, for instance, is a very conservative religious society where political or faith-based off-tracking is non-forgivable. A Muslim relinquishing his/her religion and accepting another faith is labelled as a 'Murtad' (apostate) and is to be punished by

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beheading with a sword. Even if the society forgives a person he/she will never be accepted as a respectable and trustworthy member of society. In the case of a Christian returning to Pakistan is a tale of woe and misery. The person, together with his/her family will be on the run from pillar to post for the rest of his/her life hiding his/her face/identity from public. The socio-economic life for the entire family will be hell because the person concerned will be condemned in society unable to find a decent job, face deprivation and possibly death.

The Charismatic Social Integration of Canada (CSIOC), working for the persecuted people, would like to quote the news report of **AsiaNews.it, dated 7/21/2015** regarding the plight of two young Christians who were arrested for blasphemy:

“Lahore: Two Christians arrested for blasphemy could get the death penalty

The two brothers have been accused of posting disrespectful content on their website. After four years on the run abroad and at home, Qaisar and Amoon are now in the same Lahore prison. The Centre for Legal Aid, Assistance and Settlement (CLAAS) is dealing with their case.



Lahore (AsiaNews/CLAAS) - Two Christian brothers have been arrested on blasphemy charges after one of them was accused of posting disrespectful material on his website.

A case has been registered against Qaisar and Amoon Ayub of Lahore in relations to accusations dating back to 2011.

According to Qaisar, he closed his account in 2009 but one of his Muslim friends, Shahryar Gill, somehow managed to restore the website, while ownership remained in Qaisar's name.

The story goes back to 2010 when Qaisar worked at the Raja Centre, Lahore, at the international office.

Qaisar is married to Amina and they have three children, while Amoon is married to Huma who is a teacher at the Cathedral School, Lahore.

One day an argument broke out at Qaisar's office between his friends, when one of them made a comment about another's sister.

The aggrieved friend blamed Qaisar and warned him that it is a serious matter in Pakistan. Qaisar started to receive death threats from his friends and then went into hiding.

When the situation deteriorated both brothers fled to Singapore without telling their wives, but after a month they returned to Pakistan and then Amoon told his wife the whole story.

The situation was still tense, so they left again in November 2009 for Thailand, in search of security, but could not stay there for too long time and in 2012 went back to Pakistan.

Qaisar was informed by one of his friends that the authorities were looking for him and that he could be arrested at any time because a blasphemy case had been registered against him.

On 10 November 2014, while on his way to work at the Kids Campus DHA, Amoon was arrested and told that a case had also been registered against his brother. The police asked him about his brother Qaisar and he told Amoon to stay hidden because he was accused under section 109-A PPC.

Qaisar was later arrested and sent to District jail Jhelum.

Fed up with life in Pakistan, Amoon finally decided to leave the country. On 17 November 2014, he was arrested by Immigrant Police at Lahore Airport. Later police sent him to Jhelum District Jail charged with the same offence as his brother.

Huma has done all she could to get her husband released but has failed. However, she has not lost hope and finally approached the Centre for Legal Aid, Assistance and Settlement (CLAAS) in June of this year for legal aid and support.

CLAAS is an interdenominational organization working for Christians persecuted for their faith in Pakistan. It works for religious freedom, and against persecution of Christians in Pakistan under blasphemy and other discriminatory laws.

Qaisar's 14-year-old son became mentally unwell because of his father's imprisonment, and CLAAS has arranged treatment for him and is trying its best to support both families, but prayers are equally important.

CLAAS is providing both brothers with free legal advice and have visited them in Jhelum, jail. It is also going to apply for their bail once the Eid holidays are over".

Qaiser and Amoon took the desperate step of moving to Singapore, then to Pakistan, then back again to Thailand. Eventually, the pressures around them, the toxic environment of asylum seekers in Thailand and their overall desperate circumstances became so unbearable that they were forced to return to Pakistan.

Although Qaiser and Amoon were not deported by the legal Thai authorities, their return to their country of origin exposed them to the risk of death. The case reflects the vulnerability and the risks faced by a Pakistani Christian deportee upon return to Pakistan. The Islamic Republic of Pakistan is an ultra-religious state where the clergy wields enormous political, social and street power. The country's creation was based upon two-nation theory which emphasizes the philosophy and belief that Hindus and Muslims are two different nations because they follow two different faiths. The Muslims are in absolute majority in Pakistan. There are only less than two percent Christians the majority of whom are menial workers. The Christians are much below the socio-economic and academic strata as compared to Muslims. The Christians are thus politically, economically and socially a very weak and vulnerable community.

What happens to asylum seekers when they are deported back to Pakistan can be very well assessed by looking at the current socio-political scenario that developed after the Supreme Court of Pakistan exonerated Aasiya Bibi on 31 October 2018 from the death sentence and ordered that she be released immediately. There were nationwide violent

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protests. The entire country was ransacked by the religious leaders with clergies inciting the masses to loot and arson of the life and properties of the public. The government and state authorities were helpless and silent. The Government, despite the support of the Military and other establishment agencies, succumbed to the extremist elements and signed a deal with the fanatic religious leaders. The entire nation, it seemed, wanted Aasiya Bibi hanged to death. The Muslims of Pakistan, it was declared openly, do not have any forgiveness for a person accused of blasphemy against Islam or the Prophet.

The case of Qaiser and Amoon is only the tip of the iceberg. The country is replete with untold stories of persecution and torture which go unnoticed because the state, society and media is hushed about them. Everybody is scared to speak about anything related with the Blasphemy Law. Even reading or looking at a blasphemous text is tantamount to blasphemy. With this scenario the deportation of a failed refugee or asylum seeker back to Pakistan will be like a certain death sentence.

Recommendations:

One of the problems of the deporting countries is that they are unable to monitor the nature and severity of persecution to which the deportees are exposed to upon return to the country of origin.

1. The international immigration research organizations need to develop a mechanism that gives them informational feedback on the current situation faced by deportees.
2. They need to find out the means of communication that bring to light all those cases of faith-based violence and persecution which go unnoticed or are kept hidden from public.
3. The world community develops a foolproof system that ensures the safety and security of failed refugees and asylum seekers in countries of their origin.

These measures will, to some extent, mitigate the real threat of an imminent death sentence for a deportee returned to his/her country of origin.

To be continued

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