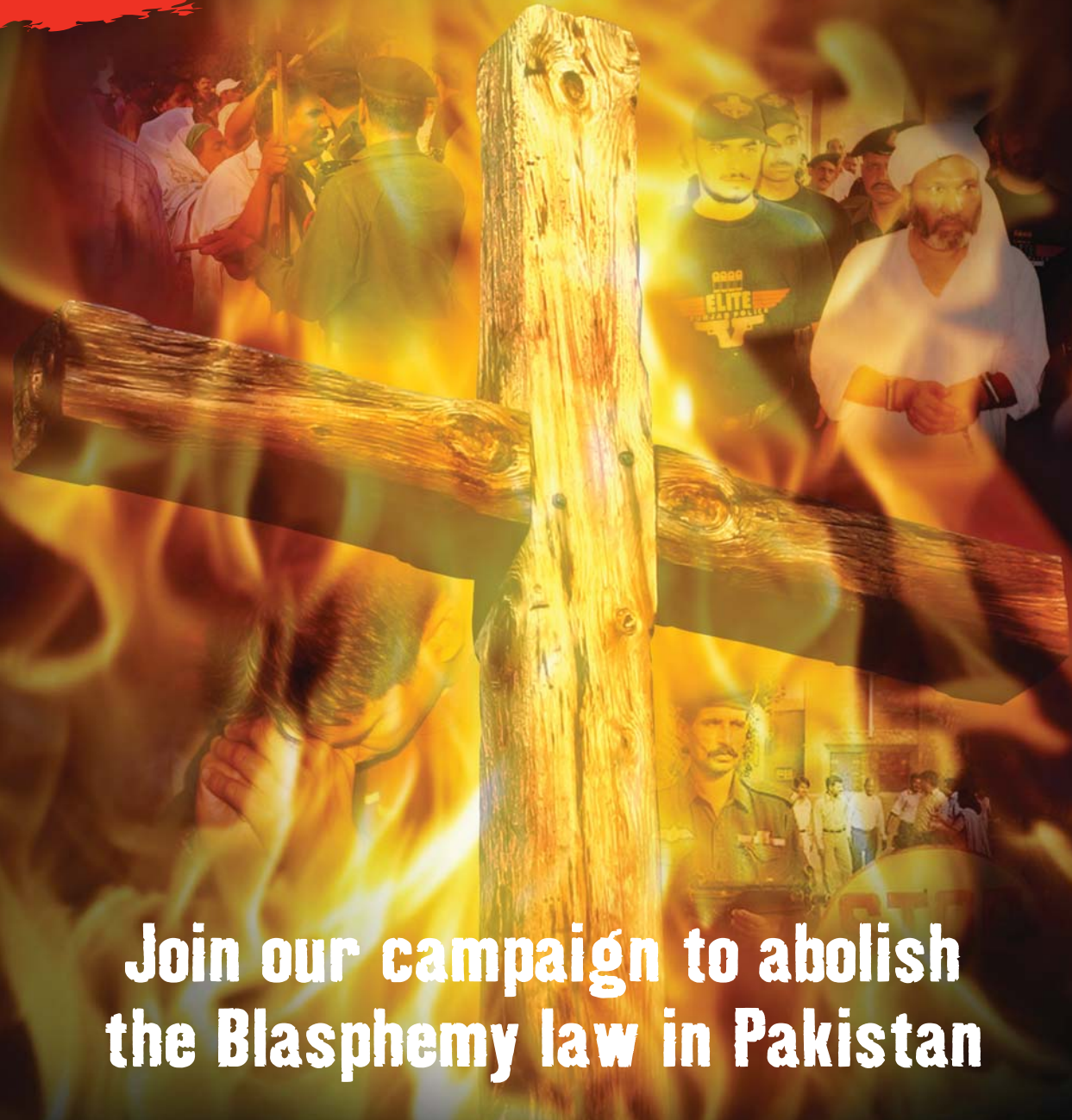




Centre for Legal Aid  
Assistance & Settlement

# Ending the abuse of the Blasphemy Law



Join our campaign to abolish  
the Blasphemy law in Pakistan

*“The problem is not so much the idea of a law against blasphemy,  
as about a law whose penalty is so severe and whose practice  
gives so much scope for allowing people to settle private scores.”*

Dr Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury



## Blasphemy Law: Ruining people's lives and dividing communities

The Blasphemy law is at the root of much suffering and persecution of Christians in Pakistan. The use and abuse of this law, is the fundamental issue underpinning discrimination and open violence against Christians and local churches.

Since 1986, hundreds of cases of blasphemy have been registered against Christians. Many people have been murdered in broad daylight by fanatics and hundreds more have been forced to flee their homes, villages or towns. And this problem is getting worse. In an environment of increasing religious intolerance and discrimination, the Blasphemy law provides the context and opportunity for persecution.

The main purpose of these laws is to make people respect Islam and the Prophet Muhammad. Unfortunately, these laws are being used to terrorize non-Muslims or force them out of the country. Such actions are not compatible with the Constitution of Pakistan which guarantees that minorities shall live in peace and security in Pakistan.

### About the Blasphemy Law

#### Section 295-C read as:

*“ Use of derogatory remarks, etc., in respect of the Holy Prophet: Whoever by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representation, or by any imputation, innuendo, or insinuation, directly or indirectly, defiles the sacred name of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) shall be punished with death, or imprisonment for life, and shall also be liable to fine. ”*

The Blasphemy law is part of Pakistan's Penal Code. It was introduced in 1860, ironically to protect the religious sentiments of the Muslim minority in the Indian sub-continent, against the Hindu majority.

By 1986, section 295-B and 295-C of this law were legislated introducing an additional clause of life imprisonment for defiling the Quran. In 1991, the Federal Shariah court

struck down the additional clause of life imprisonment in section 295-C, and made death penalty mandatory upon conviction under his section.

Anyone can be charged with blasphemy and immediately detained without any safeguards or the opportunity for bail. Under this law, the only evidence needed is one 'reliable' man's word. Ill-treatment and torture of the accused in custody are common practice. Judicial proceedings can take years, resulting in innocent victims languishing in jails with pending trials or appeal.

Because the Blasphemy law is open to abuse it has become a powerful tool to ignite religious extremism, encourage hostility towards minority groups and has given Islamic zealots opportunities to take the law in their own hands.

During the ten years, 892 people have been accused under this law and at least 25 people have been arbitrarily killed. In addition to this, public evidence from the judgments of superior courts in Pakistan shows that the Blasphemy law is being ruthlessly abused for settling personal scores.

Christians in Pakistan are demanding the repeal of the 295-C section while at the same time Muslim fundamentalists are threatening the government with widespread protests and civil disobedience. They are demanding complete enforcement of the Sharia law.

### PAKISTAN

**Population:**  
163.9 million

**Size:**  
803,940 sq km (three times the size of the UK)

**Capital:**  
Islamabad

**Main language:**  
Urdu

**Muslim:** 95%  
**Christian:** 3%  
**Other minorities:** 2%

**Religious freedom rating:**  
6 (1 is best; 7 is worst)



Pakistan, divided into East and West sections, was founded in 1947 as a Muslim homeland for Muslims who left India. In 1971, Bangladesh, formerly East Pakistan, gained independence after a nine-month civil war.

Pakistan has been under military rule for almost 30 of its 61 years of independence and therefore, democracy has not had much of a chance to grow. Pakistan's state religion is Islam and the Constitution forbids Christians and other non-Muslims to be either President or Prime Minister of the country. The current government came to power in February 2007 after the party of Pervez Musharraf (who led the country since 1999) lost the national elections.

Pakistan has a dual justice system using both normal laws (Pakistan penal code) and the Islamic Shariah laws. However, Shariah

law is considered by the Muslim majority as the supreme law of the country and is partly implemented in the country. Religious groups are campaigning to implement the Shariah law throughout the country.

Today's Pakistan is a poor and populous country, suffering from internal political disputes, lack of foreign investment, and costly confrontations with India. A culture of violence and widespread corruption leaves religious minorities vulnerable. Islamic fanatics who promote violence are rarely prosecuted or punished. Pakistani Christians are often treated like 'second class' citizens. They have limited political and civil rights, living under fear of discrimination and even imprisonment under the auspices of the country's ill-drafted 295-C Blasphemy law.



## The impact of Blasphemy Law on Christians and their communities

Christians in Pakistan are already suffering on account of sectarian legislation that prevents them from participation in key positions in the country's social, economic and civic life. In addition to this, religious persecution fuelled by the Blasphemy law means that the very lives of Christians in Pakistan are not safe.

### Wrongly accused of blasphemy and murdered

Here are just a few people whose lives were cut short by the abuse of the Blasphemy law:

- Tahir Iqbal converted to Christianity from Islam and was murdered in jail because of his conversion.
- Ashiq Nabi, another convert to Christianity was killed by a mob, following the false accusation made by his wife that he desecrated the Quran.
- Samuel Masih, accused under the Blasphemy law was killed by the police



guard who was supposed to look after him in hospital. When investigated the Muslim policeman said that his religious duty to kill a blasphemer was more important than his role as a policeman.

- Manzoor Masih shot dead as he walked out of the court after the hearing of his blasphemy case.
- Bashir Masih accused of defiling the Quran, he was murdered in jail in September 2006.

### Families on the run and communities destroyed

Even after the acquittal from blasphemy charges the victims are not free. Most of them live in hiding or even seek asylum in another country. Often whole communities are displaced, fearing further persecution, even though the blasphemy charges were proved to be false.

- In shanty Nagar, 250 houses burnt to ashes after an old man, Baba Raji was accused of committing crimes against the Blasphemy law.
- In October 2001, Islamic militants killed 15 Christians at a church in Lahore, Pakistan.
- In 1998, Christians in Ali Pur Chatha had to run for their lives when 3 Christians were accused of blasphemy.
- Three churches in Sangla Hill, the convent high school for girls and the pastor's house were burnt in November 2005 by a

mob of 3,000 people protesting against an alleged case of blasphemy of Yousaf Masih.

- In August 2006, a church and Christian homes were attacked in a village outside of Lahore in a land dispute. Three Christians were seriously injured and one missing after some 35 Muslims burned buildings, desecrated Bibles and attacked Christian families.
- In February 2006, churches and Christian schools were targeted in protests over the publications of the Jyllands-Posten cartoons in Denmark, leaving two elderly women injured and many homes and properties destroyed.



**“Praying for our persecuted brothers and Christians in Pakistan and campaigning on their behalf should be the responsibility of every Christian. That is why I urge you to get personally and together as a church involved in this campaign to abolish the Blasphemy law in Pakistan.”**



Right Revd. Michael Nazir Ali, Bishop of Rochester

Centre for Legal Aid Assistance & Settlement



## CLAAS is campaigning for the abolishment of the Blasphemy Law

The Center for Legal Aid was founded in 1992 in Pakistan and in 1998 in the UK. Our mission is to bring an end to the persecution of Christians in Pakistan and campaign on their behalf for equal rights.



CLAAS-UK is lobbying and campaigning to bring about changes to the discriminatory Blasphemy law.

### We do this by:

- Lobbying the UK and Pakistani governments, the European Parliament, the Commonwealth Secretariat, United Nations, international institutions, church leaders, and many others.
- Raising awareness through the media, local and international churches and the general public.
- Briefing MP's, MEP's and Church leaders on religious discrimination and persecution issues in Pakistan. Having been briefed they can raise these issues with Pakistani politicians and officials at the international level and other appropriate forums.



- Enlisting support from individuals, churches and partner organisations in the UK and Europe so that together we can be the voice of the persecuted Christians in Pakistan.

CLAAS is playing a vital role in keeping political institutions and the general public informed about the unfair treatment of Christians in Pakistan. Also, in challenging the Pakistani government to change the Blasphemy law. Without an organization like CLAAS the voice of Christians in Pakistan would not be heard.



## Four ways to get involved

*'Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow-prisoners, and those who are ill-treated as if you yourselves were suffering.'*

(Hebrews 13:3)



### 1. Campaign with us to abolish the Blasphemy law

You can do this by signing our campaign postcard online ([www.class.org.uk](http://www.class.org.uk)) or by calling us at: **0208 867 9180** to request campaign postcards.

We are seeking to gather as many signatures as possible to send to the Pakistani Government and to the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights.

### 2. Pray regularly

God cares and He can change even the most difficult situations. So, please pray for the progress of CLAAS' campaign and for the Pakistani Christians we are helping. Prayer updates are uploaded regularly at ([www.claas.org.uk](http://www.claas.org.uk)) to enable you to pray effectively.

### 3. Make a gift

One-off donations or regular support can help provide free legal aid and practical support for persecuted Christians in Pakistan.

Here are some examples of what your support will make possible:

- £10 can provide food and shelter for three days for the family of a wrongly imprisoned Christian believer.
- For as little as £20 a month, or a one off gift of £250, you can ensure that two or more prisoners get the legal assistance they need to clear their names.

To make an informed decision regarding giving to CLAAS please e-mail: [info@claas.org.uk](mailto:info@claas.org.uk)

### 4. Host an event in your church

This is a great way to raise awareness and support for the persecuted church. CLAAS has produced a resource pack that contains a poster for your bulletin board, an audio visual presentation and suggestions as to how your church can help.

To order your free copy of this resource today e-mail: [info@claas.org.uk](mailto:info@claas.org.uk) or use the response form in the covering letter.

To find out more about us visit: [www.claas.org.uk](http://www.claas.org.uk)

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