

A CULTURE OF HATE-MONGERING

Freedom of Religion or Belief in 2022/23



Human Rights
Commission
of Pakistan

A Culture of Hate Mongering

Freedom of Religion or Belief in 2022/23



Human Rights Commission of Pakistan

© 2024 Human Rights Commission of Pakistan

All rights reserved. Any part of this publication may be reproduced by duly acknowledging the source.

Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the contents of this publication. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan takes no responsibility for any unintentional omissions.

ISBN 978-627-7602-35-2

Printed by Visionaries Division
90A Airlines Housing Society
Khayaban-e-Jinnah, Lahore

Human Rights Commission of Pakistan
Aiwan-e-Jamhooor
107 Tipu Block, New Garden Town
Lahore 54600
T: +92 42 3583 8341, 3586 4994, 3586 9969
E: hrcp@hrcp-web.org
www.hrcp-web.org

Acknowledgements

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan is very grateful to Rabia Mehmood for writing this report.

Disclaimer: This document has been produced with the financial assistance of the European Union. The contents of this document are the sole responsibility of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan and can under no circumstances be regarded as reflecting the position of the European Union.



**Funded by the
European Union**

Contents

1	Introduction	1
2	Methodology	4
3	FORB and Pakistan’s Universal Periodic Review	5
4	Political parties and the religion card	7
5	Violent restrictions on FORB	9
5.1	Forced conversions of minority women and girls	9
5.2	Gender-based violence against minority women	11
5.3	Blasphemy and religion-related offences	11
5.4	Ahmadiyya-specific targeting	13
5.5	Bails granted to persons charged with blasphemy	14
5.6	Blasphemy cases and numbers	14
5.7	The rise of the anti-online blasphemy brigade	15
5.8	Surveillance and labelling of HRDs advocating FORB	17
5.9	Risks to lives of defenders of victims of religious discrimination	17
5.10	Institutionalized intolerance	18
5.11	Social media and hate speech	19
5.12	Targeted killings and mob violence	19
5.13	Attacks on religious practices and worship sites	20
5.14	Persecuting Ahmadis for Eid celebrations	21
5.15	Attacks on temples	22
5.16	Religious minorities targeted in death	22
5.17	Sectarian aggression and Shia killings	23
5.18	Crimes against Hindus	24
6	Recommendations	25

1 Introduction

Violence in the name of religion has increasingly become the status quo in Pakistan. Regrettably, the sentiments of majoritarian Muslims remain sacrosanct and given discriminatory preference over religious minorities and sects. In the rare instances that law enforcement authorities manage to rescue persons accused of blasphemy from religiously motivated mob violence and the organized wrath of sectarian groups, their performance of duty is hailed as heroic.

The period under review in this report, July 2022 to June 2023, shows that the state machinery has learnt little from the brutal lynching of Priyantha Kumara, the Sri Lankan national tortured to death by a mob in Sialkot in December 2021, following allegations of blasphemy. Since then, Pakistan has seen a series of lynchings, attempts at vigilante violence and targeted killings in the name of religion.

The use of the ‘religion card’ by mainstream political parties and the rhetoric of politicians who invoke religion in their electoral campaigns have further solidified sectarian narratives. Pakistani citizens have continued to pay for the security establishment’s Machiavellian reliance on far-right Islamist groups to control political space. Despite the apex court’s attempts to provide justice to victims of abuses of freedom of religion or belief (FORB), the judiciary has not succeeded in protecting religious freedoms and rights. Indeed, the state has institutionalized the practice of arresting persons accused of religion-related offences on the grounds of ‘maintaining peace’ and avoiding incitement to violence. The state’s long-held—and erroneous—view that the absence of religion-based offences would increase vigilante violence is actively used as an excuse to restrict civic space and freedoms of religious minorities. Yet, despite aggressive implementation of such laws, violence still takes place on a significant scale.

There is also a marked difference between what state representatives say publicly on global platforms and the discriminatory narratives they espouse at home. While Pakistan is bound by international obligations and recommendations that were accepted by the state during its Universal Periodic Review (UPR), glaring violations of the same international standards with regard to FORB remain a routine matter.

The duration under review also illustrates that the rise of the far-right Tehreek Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) and its formalization as a political party

are tied to an escalation in restrictions on FORB. Over the years, the TLP's brand of incitement, hate and violence, and the weaponization of selective religious interpretations have caused immense damage to the freedoms of religion and belief, and expression. Islamist parties, including the Jamaat-e-Islami and Jamiat-e-Ulema Islam (F), have used their political influence and members of parliament to push back religious freedoms. Legislation attempts by Islamist politicians to broaden the scope of the blasphemy laws have been a major setback to the possibility of an inclusive Pakistan.

A concerning trend is that of the role of sections of the legal community, which have amplified far-right rhetoric and become agents of persecution of religious minorities. Certain bar councils, for instance, have made it mandatory for lawyers to declare Ahmadis non-Muslim if they wish to practice in that province. Given that the legal community is supposed to enable recourse to justice and the rule of law, this does not augur well for FORB in Pakistan.

Religious minorities and sects continue to suffer in life and death: in addition to religiously motivated violence, they are subjected to impediments in access to worship places, fear of attacks at home, work and public spaces, profiling via arbitrary legal measures, desecration of graves and exposure to bigoted speech. A blight on the country's human rights record, incidents of forced conversion have continued. The most vulnerable segments of society, women and girls from religious minorities, suffer repeatedly in the absence of national legislation against this heinous practice and effective enforcement of child marriage laws. Minority women are also subjected to gender-based violence, but these incidents are underreported.

Lack of compliance with the landmark Supreme Court ruling by Justice Tassaduq Hussain Jilani from 2014, coupled with a seeming indifference to progressive judgements by the apex court and disregard of rights guaranteed by the Constitution, have exacerbated violations of FORB. Moreover, the restriction of civic space and targeting of human rights defenders (HRDs) has hampered attempts to campaign for a society where all marginalized groups can live with dignity and protection.

This report is the fourth in a series of reports published by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) since 2019, providing an annual overview of the state of FORB in the country. Drawing on documented incidents of violence, the spike in cases stemming from discriminatory

laws, data on prisoners, interviews with HRDs, lawyers and persecuted groups, and fact-finding missions carried out by HRCP in Punjab and Sindh, this report illustrates how the freedoms of citizens of minority faiths and those who do not subscribe to a majoritarian interpretation of the state religion, remain under continuous assault.

2 Methodology

This report is based on an analysis of published investigations by HRCP, incidents of FORB abuses documented by the press, official documents, open-source information, legal documents and legislation, social media posts and visual evidence. The report notes that government documentation of FORB violations is scarce; where it does exist, it is sketchy and/or difficult to access.

HRCP has exercised due diligence in verifying and crosschecking the credibility of its data in accordance with its methodology of monitoring human rights violations. Where required, sources have been made anonymous to mitigate any risks.

HRCP also wrote to the relevant provincial authorities to determine the number of prisoners charged with blasphemy-related offences and/or the total number of cases registered in each province, but at the time of finalizing this report, only the Sindh authorities had shared such data. The data for Punjab is already available on a government website.

To illustrate the scale of religion-related offences, HRCP also reviewed and analysed data on blasphemy cases and forced conversions compiled by independent nongovernment organizations and targeted religious minority communities.

The information gathered has been assessed in light of the Constitution, domestic law and international human rights standards, which Pakistan is also obligated to fulfil.

3 FORB and Pakistan’s Universal Periodic Review

Pakistan underwent its fourth review by the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva on 30 January 2022.¹ Domestic independent human rights monitors, civil society collectives and international watchdogs all pointed out key shortcomings and patterns of violations in their respective submissions (see Box 1).

Box 1: Pakistan’s performance at the UPR

Even if the UPR is considered ‘friendly fire’ among member states, the review brought to the fore Pakistan’s commitments on freedom of religion, belief, expression and the rights of women and children. A significant number of recommendations by member states (of 340 received in total) focused on forced conversions, the minimum age for marriage, an end to child marriage and gender-based violence, curbs on media freedoms, journalists’ security, custodial torture, the death penalty, abuse of blasphemy laws, the persecution of the Ahmadiyya community, and enforced disappearances. Discriminatory legislation that does not comply with Pakistan’s international obligations, such as the blasphemy laws, have repeatedly been questioned during previous cycles of the UPR.

However, Pakistan overwhelmingly supported recommendations on and/or that intersect with FORB. These recommendations include strengthening practical and legal measures to protect all minorities from discrimination and persecution, from violence and incitement; protection of freedom of expression, especially of activists and journalists; protection of HRDs; strengthening and enhancing the capacity of national human rights mechanisms; protection of women and girls from discrimination; ensuring the right to fair trial; and ensuring obligations pertaining to the treatment of prisoners.

In the national report for the review submitted in the last quarter of 2022, Pakistan states that its government was ‘committed to curb[ing] misuse of blasphemy laws’, that mechanisms and ‘administrative safeguards’ had been instituted for this purpose and that the provincial police force had been sensitized to the rights of religious minorities.² It further stated that Section 211 of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) guaranteed punishment for false accusations of blasphemy without lawful grounds.³ However, the evidence suggests lack of prosecution of those who have levelled false blasphemy accusations against innocent parties.

During the UPR, a member of the Pakistan delegation said that the blasphemy laws were not discriminatory.⁴ Contrary to this claim, the blasphemy laws and their applications enable a list of human rights violations, which disproportionately affect religious minorities. The laws are also primarily applied in the name of majoritarian Sunni Islam. The national report stated that one of the necessary safeguards to prevent misuse of the blasphemy laws was that only officers with the ‘minimum rank of superintendent of police could investigate the blasphemy cases.’ This claim is debunked by cases of blasphemy that are registered at the police level by junior personnel such as station house officers and even assistant sub-inspectors. Recommendations accepted by Pakistan thematically also fall under the Sustainable Development Goals and the state’s international obligations.

4 Political parties and the religion card

Continuing the trend of previous years, political parties and legislators used religious concepts as a weapon to score political points, and not only among the far right (see also Box 2). In July 2022, the then newly appointed chief minister of Punjab, Chaudhry Pervaiz Elahi of the PML-Q, directed the provincial assembly to incorporate the concept of finality of Prophethood (*khatm-e-nabuwat*) into an oath through an amendment in the form used to contract marriages (*nikkah*).⁵ The policy reflected the decades-long exclusion of the Ahmadiyya community. In a dangerous breach of privacy and FORB, a Khushab leader of the PML-Q wrote to the deputy commissioner with details of an Ahmadi man at whose house community members had gathered to pray, demanding that members of the community be evicted from the city.⁶

Box 2: The ominous rise of the TLP

As a political party, the TLP—a far-right Barelvi group that has consistently campaigned to protect and extend the blasphemy laws—continued to spread hate rhetoric in public. The TLP has used its party’s stronghold in parts of Punjab and Sindh to target Ahmadi and Christian minorities in blasphemy and religion-related offences. TLP supporters either initiate or instigate violent attacks or ensure that police cases are registered against non-Muslim citizens, using intimidation tactics. For instance, of the ten cases registered against Ahmadis in Punjab for holding private Eid-al-Azha celebrations in July 2022, nine were lodged on TLP supporters’ complaints, according to the Ahmadiyya community.⁷

One of the TLP’s organizing slogans is a brutal rallying cry for murders of alleged blasphemers, which is widely chanted at its public congregations. The TLP’s talking points and slogans have also been quoted by perpetrators of religiously motivated violence as justification for its violent acts.⁸ In September 2022, TLP leader Muhammad Naeem Chatha Qadri, while addressing a public rally, incited his listeners to kill Ahmadi newborns and attack pregnant Ahmadi women. The cleric said that ‘any Ahmadi born [from then onwards] would not be left [alive]’ by the TLP.⁹

Mainstream political parties did not refrain from weaponizing religion. In September 2022, leaders of the PML-N accused former prime minister Imran Khan of the PTI of misusing religious references.¹⁰ In response, Khan and his party supporters protested that the PML-N was putting his life at risk and threatened his adversaries with legal action.¹¹ Khan himself has frequently invoked religion in his electoral campaigns and, after his ouster,¹² to rile his supporters into civil disobedience. In

August 2022, journalist Waqar Satti was booked on charges of blasphemy and defamation via social media posts in which he discusses Khan's comments with religious references.¹³ The complainant against Satti was a PTI office holder. In November 2022, Khan survived an assassination attempt,¹⁴ the motive for which was declared to be the religious extremism¹⁵ of the alleged perpetrator by the then incumbent government.¹⁶

Islamist political parties stuck to their agenda of widening religious divides. In January 2023, JI leader Mushtaq Ahmed Chitrali tabled the Criminal Laws (Amendment) Bill to broaden the scope of the blasphemy laws. The amendments of the bill were also specifically anti-Shia, and sought to add ten years of punishment for insulting the companions of the Prophet (PBUH). The bill was passed by the National Assembly and then by the Senate.¹⁷ At the time this report was finalized, the bill had not yet been passed into law. Prior to tabling the bill, Chitrali had campaigned against the publication of religious scripture by the Ahmadiyya community.¹⁸

Established in 2020, the National Commission for Minorities (a body that is neither autonomous nor statutory) had excluded the beleaguered Ahmadiyya community.¹⁹ In December 2022, the then prime minister Shahbaz Sharif announced that the Parliament would begin working on a National Commission for Minorities draft bill.²⁰ It was eventually passed by the National Assembly despite criticism from civil society organizations, and was found to be inconsistent with the Paris Principles and not in accordance with directives of the 2014 Supreme Court judgement. A joint committee of civil society organizations presented amendments to improve the draft bill.²¹

School textbooks have long been insensitive to minority faiths and amplified discrimination in society. However, the Single National Curriculum policy brought these concerns to the fore. An HRCF fact-finding mission to South Punjab in 2022 found that religious discrimination had led to an increase in school dropout rates among Christian and Hindu students in the Yazman area of Bahawalpur.²²

In October 2022, Sindh began teaching a religious curriculum to students from seven minority faiths.²³ In March 2023, the National Curriculum Council²⁴ issued no-objection certificates for publishing religious curricula to be taught to minority students in schools run by the federal government. Previously, minority children were taught ethics as a replacement for Islamic studies.

5 Violent restrictions on FORB

5.1 *Forced conversions of minority women and girls*

We deeply regret the failure of the Parliament of Pakistan to adopt further legislation that would specifically address the issue of forced conversion and marriage impacting minority women and girls. This includes the Protection of the Rights of Religious Minorities Bill (2020), which would have provided protection and assistance to victims of forced conversions, increased prison sentences for the crime of kidnapping and forcibly converting underage minority girls, and defining marriage between a Muslim man and a minor of another religion as forced marriage, and therefore null and void. This bill was rejected by the Senate Standing Committee on Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony in September 2020, with some members of the Committee arguing that minorities in Pakistan already enjoyed sufficient rights while others reasoned that forced conversions of minorities in Pakistan was less of an issue in comparison to the treatment of minorities in India.

— Communications by UN Special Procedures to the Government of Pakistan — 26 October 2022²⁵

The UN Special Procedures' communication to the then government in October 2022 and the subsequent statement highlights the failure of the state to protect children from religious minority backgrounds against the risk of forced conversions.

Despite a list of violations linked to forced conversion, the crime has continued, primarily in Sindh and Punjab, where the majority of Hindu and Christian Pakistanis reside. An HRCP fact-finding mission conducted in February 2023 found that Ghotki, Sindh, was the 'epicentre' of forced conversions.²⁶ In September 2022, a Hindu teenager²⁷ Chanda Maharaj was abducted and later revealed to have been converted to Islam. Maharaj was handed over to the *dar-ul-aman* [government-run shelter] and not allowed to meet her family.²⁸ In December the same year, a Hindu man Laloo Kacchi was killed by a Muslim man who had abducted his sister Laali Bai Kacchi in the Kunri

area of Umarkot in Sindh.²⁹ By January 2023, the perpetrator had been released on bail.³⁰ A Christian minor aged 13 was abducted by a Muslim man from Tibba Samad Manga Mandi in Lahore, and then found to have been married to her abductor (aged 38), according to the girl's parents.³¹ In February 2023, a 17-year-old Hindu girl, Karishma Bheel, was abducted and forcibly converted in Naukot, Mirpur Khas.³² In June 2023, another Christian minor was reportedly abducted and forcibly converted; she has not been reunited with her family, as per reports from human rights monitors.

Data gathered by HRCP shows at least 20 cases of alleged forced conversion in Sindh in 2022. Research by the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) shows an uptick in the number of cases of alleged forced conversion in 2022, with a total of 124 cases, of which 81 were Hindu, 42 Christian and one Sikh; 45 of these girls were aged between 14 and 18, and 29 were younger than 18. Sindh had the highest number of forcibly converted females at 82, Punjab 40, and Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa with one each. In 2023, the CSJ verified at least 71 cases of alleged forced conversion in Sindh and Punjab. Of all districts across the country, Mirpur Khas had the highest number of cases, followed by Ghotki and Umarkot.³³ However, it must be noted that local Hindu rights collectives working on documenting cases in real time, with an extensive network on the ground, state and show that the number of Hindu women and girls' forced conversion is underreported and much higher.³⁴

HRDs engaged in the campaign against forced conversion and working closely with victims in Sindh and Punjab report that the large constituency of victims of forced conversions are from low-income households.³⁵ The data suggests the same. HRDs explained that the procedures for recovering abducted victims work against families and targeted communities, for instance, in the form of delayed first information reports (FIRs). If the victims were traced by the police, they were not allowed to meet their families during their stay at the *dar-ul-aman*.³⁶ Grooming and sexual violence were also perpetrated against victims of forced conversion, according to HRDs and lawyers. This situation indicates that the authorities fail to apply the relevant provisions of the PPC,³⁷ which could protect victims and deal with their families in a just and fair manner in accordance with due process.

There has been no progress on the legislation front to prevent forced conversions. In June 2023, Hindu members of the Sindh³⁸ assembly

raised the case of Sohna Sharma, a teenage Hindu victim of abduction and conversion. They were met with heated arguments from the house. The TLP representative in the assembly even defended such conversions to Islam.³⁹ The lack of progress in legislation or implementing bills already passed in the provinces has been a consistent obstacle to acquiring justice. The Ministry for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony invited infamous cleric, Pir Abdul Haq—known as ‘Mian Mithu’—who spearheads the campaign for forced or questionable conversions in Sindh to an event on interfaith harmony.⁴⁰ In December 2022, Mian Mithu had already been placed under sanctions by the UK.⁴¹

5.2 *Gender-based violence against minority women*

Violence against women from minority communities remained under-reported in 2022/23. Although abductions and forced conversions of minority women and girls also fall within the ambit of gender-based violence, they are not included in mainstream discussions of this category of abuse. However, some incidents of heinous gender-based violence perpetrated against women from religious minority communities do make it to the press at times, and yet do not meet the degree of reportage and public discussion they merit.

In Karachi, a Muslim youth threw acid on a young Christian woman for refusing his advances in 2023.⁴² In Samundari, Faisalabad, a missing Christian teenager was found dead after she had left the house with her father.⁴³ A Hindu widow, Daya Bheel, was found murdered and her body mutilated and dumped in a field in Hyderabad.⁴⁴ In Lahore in June 2023, a Christian woman and mother of three was raped and killed in an acid attack by a Muslim man and his accomplices for refusing to marry him.⁴⁵ Christian women subjected to domestic violence in marriages remain especially vulnerable to gender-based violence without the protection of law, as seeking divorce is difficult, primarily due to lack of progressive development and amendments to the Christian Divorce Act 1869.⁴⁶

5.3 *Blasphemy and religion-related offences*

Years on, Junaid Hafeez, the teacher and scholar from Bahauddin Zakariya University in Punjab who was charged with blasphemy in 2013, remains incarcerated on death row in Multan. Hafeez’s case is emblematic of the misuse of the blasphemy laws in Pakistan as well as of the gross miscarriage of justice. It also shows how blasphemy accusations are often linked to the repression of freedom of expression.

In Sindh, Nautan Lal,⁴⁷ a Hindu principal of a school in Ghotki, remains incarcerated for life on charges of blasphemy; his family was forced to move cities out of concern for their safety. Lal's counsel has appealed his conviction in the Sindh High Court.⁴⁸ In addition to the hundreds languishing in prisons, on death row or subjected to pre-trial detention and lengthy unfair trials, a string of new cases of blasphemy were registered across Pakistan from July 2022 to June 2023.

In a bizarre turn of events, in July 2022, the office of a mobile company franchise in Karachi was attacked by a mob for an alleged insult to revered historical Islamic personalities via the usernames of two wi-fi devices. The manager and several staff members were taken into custody. According to news reports quoting witnesses and social media posts, a screenshot of the usernames was spread via WhatsApp, which riled up the mob. Videos of men with batons vandalizing property at the market were shared on social media platforms.⁴⁹

In September 2022, a Christian man, Imran Rehman, was arrested on charges of blasphemy under sections of the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) 2016 and Anti-Terrorism Act 1997⁵⁰ for sharing an allegedly controversial message on WhatsApp. In November, his family and lawyers claimed he was tortured in custody.⁵¹ In July 2023, an anti-terrorism court rejected his plea for the elimination of terrorism charges. Rehman's lawyer told the press that his client had been traumatized and detained in a cell with inmates suffering from mental ailments.⁵² In October 2022, the police managed to save Mehwish Imran, a woman accused of blasphemy in Karachi, when a mob gathered outside the station to punish her for the alleged desecration of Islamic scriptures. Her husband claimed she had a mental illness. However, she was booked under section 295-B of the blasphemy laws.⁵³ Cases of people accused of blasphemy suffering from mental health problems after imprisonment and/or imprisoned despite their mental ailments is nothing new but remains underreported.

In Islamabad in November 2022, a Christian sanitation worker was arrested for sharing allegedly blasphemous Facebook posts on WhatsApp. His family spoke up about his arrest after two months.⁵⁴ The district court in Lahore also rejected post-arrest bail pleas of two people arrested on blasphemy charges in November 2022. One had allegedly shared insults to revered Islamic figures via WhatsApp and was arrested for running a Facebook group featuring allegedly sacrilegious posts.⁵⁵ In December the same year, a man in Azad Jammu and Kashmir was

sentenced to death for committing blasphemy via a Facebook post by the additional sessions court.⁵⁶ The same month, a resident of Dir was given life imprisonment because of an allegedly blasphemous post shared via WhatsApp.⁵⁷ In May 2023, two Christian teenagers, one of whom was a minor, were booked for blasphemy in Lahore.⁵⁸

5.4 *Ahmadiyya-specific targeting*

Cases of blasphemy and religion-related offences combined with PECA charges tend to be applied disproportionately against the embattled Ahmadiyya community. The year 2023 began with the arrest of an Ahmadi man on charges of 295-B and 298-C, the FIR for which was registered in December 2022. Two more police cases were filed against Ahmadis in Punjab and one in Karachi.⁵⁹

In December 2022, section 295-C of the blasphemy laws was posthumously added to the charges in a 2020 FIR that was originally filed under 295-A, 153-A and section 11 of PECA,⁶⁰ against the chief of administrative affairs of the Ahmadiyya community. This addition took place on the complaint of the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) to the judicial magistrate in Lahore.⁶¹ In an interview for this report, the community perceived this targeting of its senior leadership as part of a malicious campaign. The community challenged the FIA's jurisdiction in investigating PPC cases, specifically where blasphemy offences were included in the FIR. However, in 2022, the Lahore High Court dismissed the petition, stating that PECA and PPC offences could be tried together, without addressing the issue of FIA jurisdiction.⁶²

Sections 298A–C⁶³ of the PPC are widely used to restrict the religious freedoms of Ahmadi Pakistanis. Statements by the community, interviews with HRCP and police actions show that police officials' limited interpretation of these sections exacerbates the targeting of Ahmadi worship sites, desecration of graves and removal of religious inscriptions from Ahmadi-owned properties.

In March 2023, the UN Special Rapporteurs on minority issues, FORB, freedom of expression and independence of judges and lawyers wrote to the Government of Pakistan to communicate their concerns over 'violent attacks' on Ahmadis, 'hate speech' and incitement to violence by anti-Ahmadi campaigners and authorities including the police and bar councils. They further emphasized that despite their requests for 'remedial actions' by the authorities', the community's safety had continued to deteriorate.⁶⁴

5.5 Bails granted to persons charged with blasphemy

There were some positives in 2022/23, which should give civil society some semblance of hope. In two proceedings, the Supreme Court granted bail to three Christian youths in August 2022.⁶⁵ However, post-arrest bail did not guarantee their safety as far-right groups and TLP activists were known to have begun agitating against the bails. In at least one case documented for this report, one of the accused who was granted bail fled Pakistan in difficult circumstances after word of his release was spread among far-right groups.⁶⁶ In May 2023, a Christian woman and a Muslim man were granted bail by the Lahore High Court.⁶⁷

5.6 Blasphemy cases and numbers⁶⁸

Punjab leads in terms of the number of cases of blasphemy recorded across Pakistan by various institutions.⁶⁹ Table 1 provides data as of December 2023. Of 552 prisoners jailed for blasphemy offences, 485 were under trial, 44 had been convicted and 23 were either ‘unconfirmed’ as condemned or on death row. Prior to December, according to the ‘crime-wise’ population data for Punjab’s prisons, uploaded by the authorities, the total number of prisoners on blasphemy charges was 431 in August 2023.⁷⁰ This illustrates an increase of 121 (or 28 percent) in the space of one quarter.

Table 1: Number of prisoners jailed for blasphemy offences in Punjab in 2023 under PPC sections 295 A–C

<i>Male (adult)</i>	<i>Male (juvenile)</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
534	5	13	552
<i>Under trial (male)</i>	<i>Under trial (juvenile)</i>	<i>Under trial (female)</i>	
470	5	10	485
<i>Convicted (male)</i>	<i>Convicted (female)</i>		
43	1		44
<i>‘Unconfirmed’ condemned (male)</i>	<i>‘Unconfirmed’ condemned (female)</i>	<i>On death row (male)</i>	
17	2	4	23

Source: Punjab government, Prisons Department.

In Sindh’s prisons, by November 2023, 82 were incarcerated on blasphemy charges, out of which 78 were under trial and 4 were convicted, according to data from the Sindh Prisons Department. Karachi had the highest number of blasphemy-accused in Sindh at 47,

including 2 women, Hyderabad had 14 prisoners, Larkana 9, Mirpur 5, and Naushero Feroze, Ghotki and Dadu had 1 prisoner each.⁷¹

The CSJ has documented cases of religion-related offences as of September 2023, reporting 200 cases of blasphemy in 2023 and 171 in 2022 (Table 2). So far, the highest number of blasphemy cases recorded in a year was in 2020, with 208 cases.⁷²

Table 2: Number of blasphemy cases in 2022, by faith, region and city

<i>Muslim</i>	<i>Ahmadi</i>	<i>Christian</i>	<i>Hindu</i>	<i>Not specified</i>	<i>Total</i>
88	75	4	2	2	171

<i>Punjab</i>	<i>Sindh</i>	<i>Khyber Pakhtunkhwa</i>	<i>Islamabad</i>	<i>Balochistan</i>	<i>AJK</i>	<i>Total</i>
112	33	14	7	2	3	171

<i>Karachi</i>	<i>Chiniot</i>	<i>D G Khan</i>	<i>Gujranwala</i>	<i>Faisalabad</i>	<i>Labore</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Total</i>
25	21	13	13	12	7	80	171

Source: Centre for Social Justice.

5.7 *The rise of the anti-online blasphemy brigade*

In 2022, the FIA Cybercrime Wing arrested 81 accused in 65 cases of blasphemy.⁷³ PECA 2016 and sections of the PPC (295A, 295C, 298, 298A) are included in the FIA’s mandate of inquiry and investigation. Its Counter-Terrorism Wing also deals with cyber-terrorism and blasphemy and in the first six months of 2023, the wing lists one case of blasphemy in its quarterly achievements.⁷⁴ The FIA has set up units for addressing blasphemy complaints on social media, messenger apps and the internet at large, at each station of the Cybercrime Wing.⁷⁵

In addition to members of bar councils, bodies of lawyers working to advocate the discriminatory blasphemy laws, multiple groups across the country work in a dedicated manner to identify blasphemy committed online, primarily on social media, but also on WhatsApp groups and communication (see Box 3). These include the Tehreek-Tahaffuz-e-Namoos-e-Risalat Pakistan (ITNRP)—the Movement for Protection of the Sanctity of Prophethood—which is an off-shoot of Islamabad’s Lal Masjid affiliate, the Shuhahda Foundation. The 2023 new year’s

message issued by the TTNRP explicitly lists that in addition to pursuing cases of blasphemy online, their battle includes ‘defeating the Ahmadis’. In March 2023, the TTNRP issued a self-congratulatory press release⁷⁶ about an anti-terrorism court in Peshawar that had awarded a death sentence to a resident of Mardan who had allegedly committed blasphemy via a WhatsApp group in Talagang, Punjab. The accused also had terrorism charges lodged against him.⁷⁷ The TTNRP repeatedly claims and lists that it has been instrumental in obtaining death sentences for nine accused in blasphemy cases.⁷⁸

Box 3: Blasphemy allegations and social media

Since the passage of PECA 2016, it has been used to curb all forms of speech, stifle dissent and target HRDs. The blasphemy accusation campaign against the five bloggers and rights defenders who were forcibly disappeared for three weeks in January 2017 was one of the first cases that received significant attention for establishing a connection between blasphemy via tech or the internet. Prior to that, Junaid Hafeez was accused of blasphemy via Facebook comments in 2013,⁷⁹ and an Ahmadi youth was accused of a blasphemous Facebook post in Gujranwala in 2014.⁸⁰ However, it was only 2017 onwards that organized attempts to witch-hunt people for online expression or to fabricate blasphemy evidence using social media or messenger apps for vested agendas, began to emerge. The concepts of *gustakh-e-rasool* and *tauheen-e-risalat* are widely abused by lawyers and by informal but organized collectives that have been strengthened by the TLP since its registration as a political party.

The other group at the forefront of this battle to pursue blasphemy cases is the Legal Commission on Blasphemy of Pakistan (LCBP), a collective comprising primarily right-wing lawyers with a dominant presence in Punjab. All such groups are formalized by self-declared defenders of majoritarian Islam. Due to a rigorous campaign by these groups for strict state action against alleged insults to Islam and figures declared revered by majoritarian Sunni Islam, an uptick in online blasphemy complaints was reported by the FIA and these lawyers’ collectives. The Ministry of Religious Affairs quoted an FIA report in July 2023, which confirmed 400,000 complaints of online blasphemy and linked it to obscenity.⁸¹

A month prior in June, at an event hosted by Ahl-e-Sunnat-Wal-Jamaat in Rawalpindi, a member of the Council of Islamic Ideology, Mufti Muhammad Zubair, stated that a blanket ban on social media would be acceptable if it would counter online ‘blasphemy’.⁸² The LCBP’s account on social media platform X (formerly Twitter) boasts of several cases of alleged blasphemy committed online that were pursued by the law

collective. In early 2023, during an address to Sargodha’s district bar, the LCBP chief announced that the law office had established direct communication with the additional director overseeing the ‘blasphemy unit’ of the FIA’s Cybercrime Wing to register FIRs against blasphemy-related offences.⁸³

The Ahmadiyya community has also been subjected to repeated cases of alleged blasphemy and offences committed via technology in what appears to be a coordinated campaign spearheaded by Lahore-based cleric Hassan Muawaiya.⁸⁴ He has submitted FIRs and complaints and petitioned cases against the beleaguered community or is affiliated with individuals who have. Muawaiya has also directly and indirectly threatened at least two human rights defenders in 2021 and 2022 for the latter’s work.⁸⁵

5.8 *Surveillance and labelling of HRDs advocating FORB*

A glaringly repressive attack on collective freedoms of religion, expression and association took place in 2022 when the CSJ office was targeted. In July, the CSJ made a joint submission to Pakistan’s fourth UPR cycle.⁸⁶ The NGO was first smeared for having engaged in ‘anti-state’ activity and defaming Pakistan by raising forced conversions and blasphemy law-related abuses in its submission to the Human Rights Council via a news report published in an extensively read Urdu daily, *Jang*.⁸⁷ In September 2022, another news item quoting the Ministry of Interior appeared in *Jang*, accusing the CSJ of ‘negative propaganda’ against Pakistan.

These reprisals continued in the following months. The Office of the Registrar, Joint Stock Companies, issued notices to the CSJ and alleged that its UPR submission was beyond the ‘permitted’ mandate of the organization. This was used as an excuse to delay renewal of its periodic registration. The CSJ petitioned the Lahore High Court in 2022 against notices from the Office of the Registrar. In January 2023, the court adjourned the case hearings indefinitely till further notice.⁸⁸ This has been a widely used tactic to label and undermine the work of NGOs and HRDs—declaring their work to be against ‘national interests’.

5.9 *Risks to lives of defenders of victims of religious discrimination*

For years, the lawyers and HRDs who provide legal counsel to victims of the blasphemy laws have done so at great cost to their safety. The 2013 murder of Rashid Rehman, lawyer of Junaid Hafeez, remains a sobering example of this reality. The harassment and intimidation of

these lawyers continues across the country. From 2022 to 2023, at least two human rights lawyers, with a history of taking up cases of the blasphemy accused were subjected to malicious targeting. One Christian lawyer and HRD eventually had to leave the country after a sustained series of threats by members of the Khatm-e-Nabuwwat Lawyers Forum, a TLP affiliate. Prior to leaving Pakistan, he was forcibly displaced and had to relocate at least twice to save his life and protect his loved ones.⁸⁹

In 2023, an Ahmadi lawyer and HRD, who had been representing the community for decades in court, was arrested and jailed for months for having the prefix ‘Syed’ attached to his name. An FIR with charges 298-B and 298-C was registered against him; as of end-June 2023, he was still in jail. The senior lawyer who represented him was also manhandled by a group of pro-blasphemy law lawyers on the court premises.⁹⁰ In April 2023, an Ahmadi lawyer from Lalian, Chiniot, who represents Ahmadis accused of blasphemy, was attacked by a man affiliated with the Khatm-e-Nabuwwat seminary.⁹¹ The targeted HRD sustained injuries and was admitted to hospital.⁹²

These attacks on HRDs also expose the impunity with which right-wing lawyers and their supporters operate in the courts. Lawyers and fact-finding officers who routinely appear for cases in court, have to navigate a toxic and even dangerous work environment, as they are confronted with the ‘TLP or Khatm-e-Nabuwwat forums’ senior lawyers. In the court room, the far-right and their lawyers tend to speak over the judges and intimidate them into silence during proceedings.⁹³

5.10 Institutionalized intolerance

Bar associations have taken exclusionary measures that amplify the dangerous far-right rhetoric and contribute to persecution in the name of religion. In May 2023, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Bar Council made it mandatory to sign an affidavit that declares Ahmadis non-Muslim, for lawyers to practice in the province.⁹⁴ This decision was taken by the executive council of the bar council. Similarly, the Gujranwala Bar Council has also made it mandatory to sign a similar affidavit for inclusion in this lawyers’ body.⁹⁵ It must be noted that declaring Ahmadis non-Muslims when applying for a national identity card or passport—and now when signing marriage contract in Punjab—and the discriminatory amendments in Section 298 are used to justify further anti-Ahmadi actions adopted by institutions. Such measures encourage

profiling of the persecuted group in a society where public disclosure of their religious identity places a target on their back.

5.11 Social media and hate speech

While we have seen the suspension of some accounts that incite hate on platforms such as X (Twitter) and Facebook (Meta), the far-right still uses YouTube, Tiktok, X, Instagram and Meta for nefarious campaigns that create space for targeting religious minorities and/or advancing narratives around violence in the name of religion. HRDs from minority communities are frequently smeared online in hateful commentary.⁹⁶ Moreover, rights defenders and religious minorities do not have access to the relevant authorities in the social media companies that run these platforms. Therefore, in cases of emergency when social media is used for campaigns of incitement to hate and violence, there is no pathway for the affected groups to have the smear campaign terminated.

5.12 Targeted killings and mob violence

Religiously motivated killings triggered by allegations of even suspected blasphemy can be premeditated murders in Pakistan. In August 2022, an Ahmadi man was stabbed to death in Chenab Nagar, Punjab.⁹⁷ His attacker quoted and chanted slogans of the TLP.⁹⁸ In February 2023, a Christian man was killed in North Waziristan.⁹⁹ In the same month, a Pakistani-Norwegian man was shot dead by a young man in Kharian, Punjab.¹⁰⁰ On 31 March 2023, a Sikh trader was shot dead in Peshawar,¹⁰¹ and within days a Christian sanitation worker was killed in the provincial capital.¹⁰² Eventually, both targeted killings in Peshawar were claimed by the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP).¹⁰³ In June 2023, two Sikh men were shot at, resulting in one man sustaining injuries and the second losing his life.¹⁰⁴

In August 2022, a Hindu sanitation worker was rescued by the police in Hyderabad when a mob attempted to lynch him after accusing him of desecrating the Quran.¹⁰⁵ This rescue was lauded as a rare instance in which the police successfully performed their duty of controlling a mob. A case was registered against the sanitation worker.¹⁰⁶ Although he was released in September, a mentally challenged young man was arrested as the real culprit.¹⁰⁷ In October 2022, a differently abled man was killed due to mere allegations of blasphemy by a former seminary student in Ghotki, Sindh. Both the victim and perpetrator were Muslims.¹⁰⁸

However, in 2023, in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, incidents of violence by religiously motivated mobs led to a grotesque win for the

far-right over humanity. In February 2023, a brutal lynching took place in Nankana Sahib's Warburton area. The mob, consisting of young men and teenagers, attacked the designated police station, seized a man accused of blasphemy and lynched him. Video footage from Warburton showed the mob chanting slogans of *khatm-e-nabuwmat* [finality of Prophethood] and bearing supposed evidence of blasphemy. The perpetrators can also be seen damaging the police station. The police failed to face the mob and save the accused and their office properties.

In April 2023, a Chinese national working at a power plant at Dasu Dam in Kohistan barely survived a lynch mob. He was eventually released on bail.¹⁰⁹ In May, a cleric affiliated with the PTI as a political worker was beaten to death in Mardan for comments that were misinterpreted as sacrilegious during a corner meeting. Multiple videos of people beating the cleric were widely pushed on social media. The police attempted to save the man, but were overpowered by the mob.¹¹⁰

5.13 Attacks on religious practices and worship sites

As of end-June 2023, at least nine Ahmadiyya worship sites had reportedly been attacked; seven of these attacks took place in Sindh alone. Overall, the targeted sites were in Wazirabad, Karachi, Gujranwala, Mirpur Khas, Umarkot, Sargodha and Jhelum. In the first week of February 2023, four Ahmadiyya worship places in Sindh were vandalized via demolitions, gunfire and arson.

In Punjab and Sindh, the TLP leads the campaign of violence directed at Ahmadi worship sites with some help from local affiliates of the Aalmi Majlis-e-Tahaffuz-e-Khatm-e-Nabuwat (Council for the Protection of Finality of Prophethood). Visual evidence shows men demolishing minarets and domes. In videos from Karachi and Sargodha, chants supporting the TLP and *khatm-e-nabuwmat* can be overheard by supporters of the perpetrators.

In July 2023, the Ahmadiyya Jamaat reported that a TLP member had 'threatened' the police in Kalan Gujran, Jhelum, to demolish the minarets of a worship place, to which the police had responded by rounding up members of the community and confiscating their phones before demolishing the minarets (see also Box 4).¹¹¹ The Ahmadiyya community states that of the nine attacks on worship sites in 2023, the police personnel were involved in razing, demolishing or damaging their properties in two cases.

Box 4: The role of law enforcers in attacks on sites of worship

An escalation in attacks on Ahmadiyya sites of worship has been documented in past years, the bulk of which occurred in Punjab and Sindh with immense impunity. The speed and pattern of the vandalism, threats by the far-right, appeasement of extremists by law enforcers, and the authorities' proactive approach to defacing facades of Ahmadi properties and demolishing minarets all point towards the ready willingness of law enforcement personnel to put the sentiments of the Muslim majority first, in the guise of maintaining law and order.

HRDs and community spokespersons maintain that at neighbourhood meetings to resolve crises caused by hostilities initiated by the far-right and sectarian religious outfits, law enforcers never vouch for the minority community. In cases where worship sites have been desecrated, wherever district administrations and the police state that the beleaguered group 'consented' to the demolition or harm to the site, it appears to be a matter of interpretation.

The Ahmadiyya community has maintained for years that their peacekeeping and respect for law are always falsely interpreted as consent by the authorities.¹¹² An HRCP fact-finding mission that investigated attacks on Ahmadi in Punjab in January 2023, found that the TLP had been running a targeted campaign against the community in Gujranwala and its surroundings, and that the police, along with the district administration, had given into TLP pressure instead of curbing it. This appeasement helped create a permissive environment for attacks on the Ahmadiyya community in the region.¹¹³

It is important to note that social media accounts on social platform X (formerly Twitter) began posting about Ahmadi worship sites that were eventually targeted by the TLP in 2023.¹¹⁴

5.14 Persecuting Ahmadis for Eid celebrations

The targeting of Ahmadis while on their way to or from prayers through acts of violence and intimidation is no longer rare. They are increasingly witch-hunted for observing Eid in private via organized, coordinated campaigns despite the Supreme Court judgment issued by Justice Mansoor Ali Shah in 2021¹¹⁵ and the landmark 2014 Supreme Court judgement, both of which guarantee protections for minorities' religious practice and worship sites. In 2022, at the time of Eid-Al-Azha, at least ten cases were registered against Ahmadi men for ritual animal sacrifice.¹¹⁶ The TLP campaigned to incite its followers into barring the community's Eid celebrations through pamphlets circulated offline and online.¹¹⁷ For instance, according to a TLP pamphlet, the party's local leader, Abdur Rauf Salik, visited the area's DSP and SHO in

Sheikhupura and submitted applications to ban Ahmadiyya residents from observing Eid rituals.

On 23 June 2023, the office of the Punjab home secretary sent a directive to all deputy commissioners in the province stating that ‘only Muslims shall be allowed to perform Qurbani in accordance with Islamic rites.’¹¹⁸ On 24 June, the DPO for Hafizabad sent a notification to his subordinate staff ensuring that Ahmadis would not carry out ritual animal sacrifice, for them to have this written by the local Ahmadi community on stamp paper and sent to the ‘nearest security branch’ within two day.¹¹⁹

In 2023, six FIRs were filed before and during Eid and a number of arrests took place in Punjab.¹²⁰ According to a lawyer in Faisalabad, who also belongs to the community, police stations covering these neighbourhoods told the community not to practice ritual animal sacrifice or give it to them in writing that Ahmadis would refrain from doing so. An Ahmadi minor was detained for hours on Eid day in Faisalabad and police confiscated meat from Ahmadi homes, according to reports from the Jamaat-e-Ahmadiyya and a local Ahmadi resident. Video and photographic evidence from the day show uniformed policemen with non-Ahmadi residents confiscating sacrificial animals.

5.15 Attacks on temples

A Hindu temple was vandalized in Karachi’s Korangi Town in June 2022. The statue of a deity inside the temple was damaged.¹²¹ In 2023, a gang of dacoits opened indiscriminate fire on a Hindu temple in Kashmore, Sindh. Senior police officials told the press that the perpetrators had meant to target the homeowner who lived next to the temple and the attack was not religiously motivated.¹²²

HRCF issued a statement raising concerns over unrest in Kashmore and Ghotki, in addition to asking for protection for vulnerable Hindu residents of these cities.¹²³ However, the incident enhanced the feeling of insecurity among the Hindu community in these cities, and the police increased security for the protection of temples.¹²⁴

5.16 Religious minorities targeted in death

Desecration of Ahmadi graves. More than 87 Ahmadiyya graves were desecrated in 2022/23, of which at least 84 were in Punjab. In July 2022, at least 53 graves were desecrated in Gujranwala, Punjab. The police were found to have been complicit in the desecration of these graves,

according to an HRCP fact-finding mission.¹²⁵ In August 2022, 16 Ahmadi graves were desecrated in the walled graveyard of Chak 203 RB Mananwala in Faisalabad.¹²⁶ The community claimed that this graveyard had existed since 1947. In November 2022, Ahmadiyya graves were defaced in Premkot, Hafizabad.¹²⁷ In January 2023, unidentified men vandalized Ahmadiyya graves in 89 Ratan GB in Faisalabad. In February, five Ahmadi gravestones were defaced in Talwandi Khajoorwali in Gujranwala.

Hindu cemeteries. A Hindu woman's ashes were desecrated and scattered outside a crematorium in Kalat, Balochistan in October 2022. The vulnerability of the community was reportedly due to lack of security, which the local administration had refused to provide.¹²⁸ Additionally, an HRCP fact-finding to South Punjab in 2022 established that access to Christian and Hindu cemeteries was obstructed by the 'unauthorized occupation of surrounding areas' by Muslim residents of Bahawalpur.¹²⁹

Christians in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The problem of land being unavailable for dignified burial for the Christian community in Bajaur has persisted for years.¹³⁰ However, Christians in Peshawar and other districts are confronted with the urgent need for more graveyards for their dead, with only four graveyards for a population of over 70,000 Christians as of February 2023.¹³¹

5.17 Sectarian aggression and Shia killings

The Shia community across Pakistan remained vulnerable to blasphemy cases and other charges under religiously motivated laws during 2022/23. Sections 295-A and 298-A were repeatedly used in FIRs against the Shia community, based on a review of police reports by HRCP. In August 2022, at the beginning of Muharram,¹³² two members of the Shia community were killed in clashes that began after a Shia leader hoisted a flag of religious significance to the community in Khomar Chowk in Gilgit, according to local police.¹³³ In September 2022, a religious procession led by the Shia community in Sialkot was attacked by perpetrators carrying firearms, iron rods and stones, injuring several devotees.¹³⁴ Two weeks after this attack, a Shia orator was targeted-killed in the city.¹³⁵

In 2023, sectarian tensions mounted in Kurram, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where clashes between rival sects escalated until a ceasefire was called and decided on in July. However, the tension in the region has persisted and all differences have taken a sectarian shape. Violence in the region

reached the degree that six Shia teachers at a Parachinar school were killed in May 2023 in what was reported as a retaliatory sectarian attack.¹³⁶ In a statement from July,¹³⁷ HRCP pointed out that the clashes had ‘interrupted access to schools and curtailed freedom of movement, especially that of the local Shia community’, adding that militancy fed into existing sectarian differences.¹³⁸

While sectarian violence against the Shia Hazara community in Quetta has decreased, with no reported incidents in 2022/23, the community remains largely confined to neighbourhoods in Hazara Town and Marriabad and still requires a security escort when venturing into the main city.

5.18 Crimes against Hindus

The Hindu community has been increasingly exposed to crime in Sindh as they are a soft target for criminal actors. Abductions for ransom, murder and extortion have led to displacement according to community representatives. In March 2023, a Hindu ophthalmologist was gunned down in Karachi.¹³⁹ In Hyderabad, another Hindu dermatologist was killed by his private driver.¹⁴⁰ It was not clear, however, if these were faith-based killings.

6 Recommendations

HRCP presents the following recommendations for the federal government, state authorities and judiciary:

- Ensure that Pakistan's international human rights commitments on freedoms of religion or belief, and expression are fully met in accordance with Articles 19, 20, 26 and 27 of the ICCPR and Articles 18 and 19 of the UDHR.
- Demonstrate the urgency of enforcing and complying with the 2014 Supreme Court judgement on the rights of religious minorities.
- Ensure that the right to fair trial is upheld for persons accused of any and all religion-related offences. Police, prosecution and members of the judiciary must perform their duties impartially and independently, and must not be impacted by religious belief or pressure from third parties.
- Implement existing legislative protections against false accusations of blasphemy. To prosecute false accusations and create deterrence, make use of section 211 of the PPC, which includes imprisonment for seven years and a fine.
- Implement the recommendations put forward by the National Commission for Human Rights in 2016 to reduce the misapplication and misuse of the blasphemy laws.
- Prosecute those responsible for planning and carrying out religiously motivated violent attacks in accordance with the law and international standards.
- Ensure that the views and practices of religious minorities are not deemed inherently suspicious and as grounds for incitement by default.
- Ensure that political party candidates and leaders who participate in hate campaigns and contribute to inflammatory anti-minority political rhetoric are held to account by the Election Commission of Pakistan.
- Law enforcement, prosecutors and the judiciary must ensure that their duty to investigate and adjudicate religion-related offences is done with impartiality and independence.

- Develop training methodologies for judges in the curricula of the provincial and federal judicial academy so that they are sensitized to human rights. Judges holding far-right views must not be appointed to the bench.
- Develop curricula and training methodologies for the legal community, bureaucracy and law enforcement that emphasize upholding and implementing international human rights standards.
- High court administrations must supervise and evaluate judgements by subordinate judges to assess if due process was observed and if such judgments are compatible with the human rights guaranteed by the Constitution and Pakistan's international commitments.
- Develop and enforce a mechanism to regulate bar councils and associations, and assess and track the conduct of lawyers who actively support hate and incitement campaigns.
- Ensure that officers of the FIA Cybercrime Unit and blasphemy reporting cells are not compromised and influenced by their own religious affiliations.
- The Pakistan Telecommunication Authority and FIA Cybercrime Wing must make public their criteria for and process of vetting and investigating blasphemy accusations via FIR complaints. They must also engage with qualified experts on the subject and subscribe to a higher threshold for evidence for online blasphemy accusations.
- Engage with members of all religious minorities, experts of local and international human rights standards and civil society organizations to produce a deterrence policy that can protect religious minorities and majorities alike from incitement and religiously motivated violence.

Endnotes

- ¹ Pakistan's previous three UPRs took place in 2008, 2012 and 2017.
- ² See para 53, page 9: [A/HRC/WG.6/42/PAK/1](#)
- ³ See para 54, page 9: [A/HRC/WG.6/42/PAK/1](#)
- ⁴ See para 41: [A/HRC/WG.6/42/PAK/1](#)
- ⁵ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1702386/updated-form-a-must-for-solemnising-nikah-in-punjab>
- ⁶ <https://thefridaytimes.com/01-Aug-2022/pml-q-leader-calls-for- eviction-of-ahmadis-from-khushab>
- ⁷ Interview conducted as part of this report.
- ⁸ <https://thefridaytimes.com/21-Nov-2021/the-architects-of-project- tlp-have-unleashed-chaos-will-they-be-held-accountable>. For more on the impact of the TLP's incitement to hate and violence, see Section 5.3.
- ⁹ A six-minute video clip of the speech reviewed for this report. For more: <https://voicepk.net/2022/09/video-shows- tlp-leader-inciting-violence-against-pregnant-ahmadi-women/> and <https://krosskonnection.pk/2022/10/video- tlp-leader-incites-followers-to-attack-pregnant-ahmadi-women/>
- ¹⁰ The PML-N was part of the ruling coalition since April 2022, after Imran Khan's ouster via a vote of no confidence by the Parliament.
- ¹¹ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1709751>
- ¹² A clip of this speech is available here: https://twitter.com/Syyeda14/status/1552372648717570048?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ct wcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwtterm%5E1552381790295408640%7Ctwgr%5E7db3b7aad aec343c499fd3f10a019a9fc3d7e77b%7Ctwcon%5Es3_&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww .thefridaytimes.com%2F2022%2F07%2F28%2Fsocial-media-shocked-over-imran-khans- comments-about-shirk%2F
- ¹³ Satti was booked under section 295-A of the blasphemy laws, a hate speech section. See: <https://cpi.org/2022/08/punjab-authorities-open-blasphemy-and-defamation- investigation-into-pakistani-journalist-waqar-satti/>; <https://www.dawn.com/news/1707201>
- ¹⁴ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/11/3/pakistan-ex-pm-imran-khan-was-shot- what-where-and-why>
- ¹⁵ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1719073>
- ¹⁶ Mr Khan rejected the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) government's claims that the assassination was attempted by a lone shooter who targeted him for misleading the public.
- ¹⁷ The Senate passed this draft bill in August 2023 (beyond this document's reporting period). Former president Arif Alvi stated that he had not enacted the bill into law. Thus, its status at the time this report was finalized is not clear.
- ¹⁸ Mushtaq Ahmed Chitrali has shared anti-Ahmadiyya posts on his social media platforms.
- ¹⁹ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/08/pakistan-ahmadis-kept-minorities- commission>. The commission was delegated to the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony, which undermined its autonomy. <https://mora.gov.pk/Detail/NDBhZVWViZDUtZmEzOC00ZDlhLWJiMzEtM2MwZDQ zZjNiMWM5>
- ²⁰ <https://www.geo.tv/latest/460311-pm-shehbaz-vows-to-protect-right-of-religious- minorities>

²¹ <https://thefridaytimes.com/14-Jul-2023/human-rights-defenders-demand-amendments-in-minorities-commission-bill>. The bill was eventually dropped by the Senate in August 2023.

²² <https://hrcp-web.org/hrpweb/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/2022-South-Punjab-Excluded-exploited-EN.pdf>

²³ These seven minority faiths are: Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism, Bahai, Zoroastrianism, Kalasha and Buddhism. <https://www.nation.com.pk/22-Oct-2022/national-curriculum-for-seven-minority-faiths-launched-in-sindh> and

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2380518/separate-curriculum-for-minorities-likely>

²⁴ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1740572>

²⁵ This communication was made public in December 2022 and was followed by a statement on 16 January 2023. The excerpt is from UN experts on contemporary forms of slavery, trafficking, sale and exploitation of children, discrimination and violence against women, protection of women and children, minority issues and freedom of religion and belief, who had written to the Government of Pakistan when six cases of forced conversion of women and girls from the Hindu and Christian communities were reported in the last quarter of 2022. See:

<https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=27585> and <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/01/pakistan-un-experts-urge-action-coerced-religious-conversions-forced-and>

²⁶ The fact-finding report was published in September 2023, but the investigation was carried out in February 2023 (within this document's reporting period).

²⁷ With Chanda Maharaj, another teenager Jasmi Meghwar was allegedly abducted and forcibly converted. This case was underreported and disseminated via social media platforms primarily. <https://krosskonnektion.pk/2022/10/another-two-minor-hindu-girls-abducted-in-sindh/>

²⁸ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1719369>

²⁹ <https://therisenews.com/2023/01/01/another-hindu-man-succumbed-to-his-injuries-in-five-days-and-his-sister-abducted/> and <https://thefridaytimes.com/23-Feb-2023/minorities-live-in-fear-as-allegations-of-forced-conversions-rise-in-pakistan>

³⁰ <https://dissenttoday.net/featured/man-accused-of-killing-hindu-citizen-and-abducting-his-sister-in-sindh-gets-bail/>

³¹ <https://krosskonnektion.pk/2023/03/13yo-christian-girl-forcibly-converted-married-in-lahore/>

³² <https://therisenews.com/2023/02/25/being-hindu-daughters-are-converted-forcibly/>

³³ Data shared by the CSJ of cases from January till July 2023.

³⁴ Most of this reporting draws on documents shared via open-source social media platforms and independent digital platforms.

³⁵ Interviews with HRDs conducted for this report.

³⁶ Government-run shelter homes for women and girls across Pakistan.

³⁷ Section 498-B on prohibition of forced marriage, sections 375 and 376 on rape and sexual relationship with a teenager under 16, section 365-B on kidnapping, abducting and forcing a woman to consent to a marriage under duress, section 361 on kidnapping a minor, section 364 on kidnapping a minor and subjecting them to slavery and/or sexual abuse. See Pakistan Penal Code:

<https://www.pakistan.org/pakistan/legislation/1860/actXLVof1860.html>

³⁸ Sindh passed the Child Marriages Restraint Act in 2023, which determined the minimum age for marriage of both males and females to be 18 years.

³⁹ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2420803/forced-conversion-sparks-heated-debate-in-sindh-pa>; <https://www.brecorder.com/news/40246753>

⁴⁰ <https://www.ucanews.com/news/pakistan-christians-slam-religious-ministries-seminar/100233#:~:text=Pir%20Abdul%20Haq%2C%20alias%20Mian,extremism%2C%20said%20a%20Christian%20leader.>

⁴¹ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1725577>

⁴² <https://krosskconnection.pk/2023/02/muslim-neighbour-throws-acid-at-christian-girl-for-refusing-romantic-overtures/>

⁴³ <https://voicepk.net/2023/01/missing-christian-teenage-girl-found-dead/>

⁴⁴ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1729273>;

<https://edition.cnn.com/2022/12/30/asia/pakistan-sindh-hindu-woman-body-mutilated-intl-hnk/index.html>; <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/1032004-her-name-was-daya-bheel>

⁴⁵ <https://www.aajenglish.tv/news/30326058>; <https://thefridaytimes.com/03-Jul-2023/christian-widow-gang-raped-murdered-in-lahore>

⁴⁶ <https://voicepk.net/2023/04/forum-calls-for-5-party-tickets-for-minorities-in-general-elections/>; <https://loksujag.com/story/christian-divorce-problem-eng>;

<https://tnnenglish.com/christian-marriages-and-divorce-laws-are-causing-issues-to-women/>

⁴⁷ <https://www.uscirf.gov/religious-prisoners-conscience/forb-victims-database/notan-lal>

⁴⁸ Interviews with a minority rights defender in Sindh and Nautan Lal's lawyer.

⁴⁹ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1697664>. More details of the incident can be read in this BBC World Service story in Urdu: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1697664>

⁵⁰ Charges against Imran Rehman include 295-A and B, 298 of PPC, section 11 of PECA, sections 6, 8, 9 and 7 of ATA.

⁵¹ <https://www.asianews.it/news-en/Christian-tortured-in-prison-to-'confess'-to-blasphemy-57130.html>; <https://www.pakchristiannews.com/details/488>

⁵² <https://morningstarnews.org/2023/07/christian-charged-with-blasphemy-under-pakistans-terrorism-law/>; <https://thefridaytimes.com/12-Jul-2023/petition-seeking-removal-of-terrorism-charges-against-blasphemy-accused-dismissed>

⁵³ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1717189>

⁵⁴ <https://krosskconnection.pk/2023/01/christian-sanitary-worker-charged-with-blasphemy-over-alleged-social-media-posts/>

⁵⁵ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2388702/court-dismisses-post-arrest-bails-in-blasphemy-cases>

⁵⁶ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1696764>

⁵⁷ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1724073/dir-resident-gets-death-prison-terms-over-blasphemy-other-religious-offences>

⁵⁸ See: <https://www.csw.org.uk/2023/05/22/press/6003/article.htm> and

<https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2023/05/20/family-christian-boys-accused-of-blasphemy-after-argument-with-policeman/>

⁵⁹ FIRs reviewed during the preparation of this report.

⁶⁰ Sections 295-A, 153-A of PPC, and 11 of PECA are hate speech laws. The accused was targeted for his views on a YouTube channel.

⁶¹ FIR and court order reviewed.

⁶² See judgement: <https://sys.lhc.gov.pk/appjudgments/2022LHC8819.pdf>

⁶³ Pakistan Penal Code (1860): <https://pakistancode.gov.pk/english/UY2Fqajw1-apaUY2Fqa-apaUY2Npa5lo-sg-jjjjjjjjjjjj>. For more on the background to blasphemy and religion-related offences, see: <https://www.hrw.org/reports/1993/pakistan/>

⁶⁴

<https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=27923>

⁶⁵ <https://www.fides.org/en/news/72725->

ASIA_PAKISTAN_Bail_granted_to_three_Christians_accused_of_blasphemy

⁶⁶ Interview with the lawyer of the accused and legal document review.

⁶⁷ <https://thefridaytimes.com/15-May-2023/bail-granted-to-christian-woman-muslim-gardener-in-blasphemy-case/>; <https://krossconnection.pk/2023/05/christian-woman-falsely-charged-with-blasphemy-gets-bail/>

⁶⁸ The data in this section extends beyond the reporting period but was deemed necessary to include to illustrate the gravity of the problem.

⁶⁹ The data on blasphemy cases is not exhaustive and/or collected through primary research. The report gives figures from different sources, including the government, to reflect the landscape and scale of blasphemy cases.

⁷⁰ https://prisons.punjab.gov.pk/system/files/Crime%20Wise_0.pdf (13 December) and https://prisons.punjab.gov.pk/crime_wise_population. The previous data was updated on 28 August 2023. The URL cannot be accessed any longer but was originally available here: <https://prisons.punjab.gov.pk/system/files/Crime%20Wise28.08.2023.pdf>

⁷¹ This data on blasphemy prisoners is from the Sindh government's Prisons Department and Correctional Facility.

⁷² <https://www.pakchristiannews.com/details/488> (p. 12).

⁷³ <https://www.fia.gov.pk/files/publications/1570609486.pdf> (p. 88).

⁷⁴ <https://www.fia.gov.pk/files/publications/388759809.pdf> (p. 38).

⁷⁵ <https://www.thenews.com.pk/tns/detail/999933-fia-gets-a-blasphemy-cell>

⁷⁶ Press release reviewed (issued on 24 March 2023). By 26 March, the AFP had reported on the story of the death sentence being awarded to the victim.

⁷⁷ <https://www.brecorder.com/news/40233413>

⁷⁸ Claims made through official statement by the TTNRP sent via email.

⁷⁹ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/02/05/pakistani-professors-endless-blasphemy-trial>

⁸⁰ The accusation led to mob violence targeting dozens of Ahmadi households in Gujranwala via an arson attack which claimed three lives.

⁸¹

<https://mora.gov.pk/NewsDetail/NWRmNzFIOTctOGE5YS00YTM1LThiYWMTMTFlNWNjNTc4Y2E5>

⁸² See video: <https://twitter.com/LCBPOfficial/status/1671544253162606593> and story: <https://twitter.com/LCBPOfficial/status/1669359209161564163/photo/1>

⁸³ Watch: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lKesQHAmZxw>

⁸⁴ Hassan Muawiya has been active in a hate campaign against the Ahmadiyya community since at least 2013. For more on his campaign, see:

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/7/26/ahmadi-persecution-pakistan-blasphemy-islam> and <https://nayadaur.tv/05-Oct-2020/prime-minister-khan-s-not-so-special-representative-on-religious-harmony>

⁸⁵ Case work reviewed for this report.

⁸⁶ NGOs and national human rights institutions can make submissions on the human rights records of states under review in the Universal Periodic Review as 'stakeholders': <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/ngos-nhris>

⁸⁷ <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/252172/pakistani-civil-society-rejects-government-s-allegations-against-catholic-rights-group>

⁸⁸ In February 2023, the UN Special Rapporteurs on human rights defenders, freedom of expression, assembly and association, and minority issues wrote to the Government of Pakistan with details of reprisals against the CSJ. This communication was made public 60 days after the letter:

<https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=27846>

⁸⁹ The case documents reviewed for this report and other international organizations establish severe threats to the life of the lawyer/human rights defender.

⁹⁰ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1753643>

⁹¹ The Finality of Prophethood Council runs several seminaries and has had a longstanding anti-Ahmadi campaign.

⁹²

<https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=28285>

⁹³ Interviews with lawyers representing the Christian and Ahmadi communities.

⁹⁴ <https://www.aajenglish.tv/news/30320041>

⁹⁵

<https://spcommreports.ohchr.org/TMResultsBase/DownloadPublicCommunicationFile?gId=27923>

⁹⁶ Interviews with HRCP and review of selected posts.

⁹⁷ <https://www.thefridaytimes.com/2022/08/12/ahmadi-man-stabbed-to-death-by-fanatic-in-chenab-nagar/>

⁹⁸ <https://voicepk.net/2022/08/press-release-sadr-anjuman-ahmadiyya-pakistan/>

⁹⁹ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1738773>

¹⁰⁰ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1738229/elderly-man-killed-one-of-killers-also-found-dead-later>

¹⁰¹ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1745255/sikh-trader-shot-dead-in-peshawar>

¹⁰² <https://e.thenews.com.pk/detail?id=189757>

¹⁰³ <https://voicepk.net/2023/04/daesh-lay-claim-to-target-killing-of-christian-sikh-men-in-peshawar/> and <https://www.dawn.com/news/1764015>

¹⁰⁴ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1761338/sikh-shopkeeper-injured-in-peshawar-firing>; <https://e.thenews.com.pk/detail?id=214557>

¹⁰⁵ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1706525>; <https://www.dawn.com/news/1706235>

¹⁰⁶ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1706220>

¹⁰⁷ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1707893>

¹⁰⁸ <https://voicepk.net/2022/10/disabled-ghotki-youth-killed-over-blasphemy-accusation/>. For a detailed account, see BBC World Service story in Urdu:

<https://www.bbc.com/urdu/pakistan-63102566>

¹⁰⁹ <https://apnews.com/article/chinese-national-released-blasphemy-pakistan-a3b16a38010ec5938eaf86fce7f2059b>

¹¹⁰ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2415515/pti-supporter-cleric-lynched-in-mardan> and <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/5/7/pakistani-man-lynched-over-alleged-blasphemy-remarks-during-rally>

¹¹¹ Interview with the Ahmadiyya Jamaat spokesperson and reports from July 2023.

¹¹² Interviews with HRCP.

¹¹³ <https://hrcp-web.org/hrcpweb/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/2023-Attacks-on-religious-minorities-sites-of-worship.pdf>

¹¹⁴ One of these worship sites was eventually vandalized in Mahmoodabad Punjab in September 2023.

¹¹⁵ https://www.supremecourt.gov.pk/downloads_judgements/crl.p._916_1_2021.pdf

¹¹⁶ FIRs reviewed for this report.

¹¹⁷ TLP hate campaign material reviewed for this report.

¹¹⁸ The subject of the directive was: Instructions for All Eid Prayer Gatherings

¹¹⁹ Both said notifications reviewed for this report.

¹²⁰ Interview with one of the lawyers and FIRs reviewed.

¹²¹ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1693939/hindu-temple-vandalised-in-karachis-korangi-area>

¹²² <https://www.dawn.com/news/1765098>

¹²³ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1765062>

¹²⁴ <https://www.nation.com.pk/18-Jul-2023/security-for-hindu-temples-beefed-up-across-province-sindh-assembly-told>

¹²⁵ <https://thefridaytimes.com/08-Jul-2022/police-allegedly-desecrate-53-ahmadi-graves-in-gujranwala-days-before-eid>. An HRCP fact-finding mission also verified this attack by the police on the graves of the community.

¹²⁶ <https://thefridaytimes.com/24-Aug-2022/unidentified-miscreants-desecrate-16-ahmadiyya-graves>

¹²⁷ <https://thefridaytimes.com/29-Nov-2022/ahmadi-graves-in-punjab-s-hafizabad-desecrated>

¹²⁸ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1713202>

¹²⁹ <https://hrcp-web.org/hrcpweb/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/2022-South-Punjab-Excluded-exploited-EN.pdf> (p. 7).

¹³⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qjS7mo9BIDk>

¹³¹ <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/1041123-christian-community-facing-shortage-of-graveyards>

¹³² The first month of the Islamic calendar, which is of particular religious value to all Muslims, but especially for Shia Muslims.

¹³³ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1702608>

¹³⁴ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1710601>

¹³⁵ The victim was a *zakir* (Shia scholar). Reports by digital publications with a focus on the Shia community in Pakistan report that members of Tehreek Labbaik Ya Rasul-Ullah headed by Ashraf Jalali, were involved in the targeted killing of the Shia orator:

<https://shiawaves.com/english/news/islam/pakistan/86005-pakistan-sialkot-arbaeen-procession-attacked/>; <https://shiawaves.com/english/news/islam/pakistan/86306-shia-reciter-martyred-in-sialkot/>; <https://shiiite.news/featured/item/146880-zakir-naveed-ashiq-ba-martyred-during-the-majlis-in-sialkot/>

¹³⁶ <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/shooting-kills-seven-teachers-northwest-pakistan-school-geo-tv-2023-05-04/>

¹³⁷ HRCP's July 2023 statement is mentioned here as it is linked to the sectarian tension that occurred in Kurram during the period under review for this report.

¹³⁸

https://twitter.com/HRCP87/status/1678693624090099712?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1678693629127426049%7Ctwgr%5E9826b588d930268eeec4c53dcc9bbb7de8566b75%7Ctwcon%5Es2_&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.dawn.com%2Fnews%2F1764149;

<https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2023/07/10/parachinar-elders-decry-institutions-inaction-to-prevent-cross-border-terrorism/>

¹³⁹ <https://www.geo.tv/latest/479432-eye-specialist-dr-birbal-genani-gunned-down-in-karachi>

¹⁴⁰ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1741019>