



## **BRIEFING**

### *The Persecution of Ahmadi Muslims in Pakistan*

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# **PAKISTAN**

## **The Issue**

The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in Pakistan is the only religious community to be targeted by the Pakistan state on grounds of faith.

Perpetrators are given free rein to attack innocent Ahmadis in the knowledge that they will never face prosecution for their actions.

Hundreds of Ahmadis have been murdered and the targeted killing of Ahmadis continues with impunity.

Ahmadis cannot call themselves Muslims and are prohibited by law to vote as Muslims. Ahmadis are openly declared ‘wajibul qatl’ (deserving to be killed) in the Pakistani media and by religious clerics with neither the state nor civic society willing to stand up for Ahmadis and against the extremists.

## **Pakistan’s Anti-Ahmadi Laws**

1974: Prime Minister Bhutto amends the Pakistan Constitution to declare Ahmadis as non-Muslim for the purposes of law.

1984: Under General Zia, the Government of Pakistan enacts Ordinance XX<sup>1</sup>, making it a criminal offence, punishable by 3 years imprisonment and a fine or death, for Ahmadis to:

- Call themselves Muslims
- Refer to their faith as Islam
- Call their place of worship a ‘Mosque’
- Make the call for prayers (Adhan)
- Preach or propagate their faith
- “Pose” as Muslims

These laws and their application constitute a denial of the rights of Ahmadi Muslims to freely profess and practise their faith without interference from the state. The laws conflict with the constitutional right to freedom of religion enshrined in Pakistan’s constitution and represents a violation of international human rights treaties to which Pakistan is signatory.

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<sup>1</sup> Section 298C of Pakistan’s Penal Code states:

*“Any person of the group ... ‘Ahmadis’ ... who, directly or indirectly, poses himself as Muslim, or calls, or refers to, his faith as Islam, or preaches or propagates his faith, or invites others to accept his faith, by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representations, or in any manner whatsoever outrages the religious feelings of Muslims, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to three years and shall also be liable to fine.”*

The laws are also contrary to the vision of the founder, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, that the state has no right to interfere in the religious belief of its citizens.

## **Current Situation**

The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in Pakistan is currently facing one of the most severe waves of persecution in its history, marked by a sharp increase in religiously motivated violence, systemic discrimination, and an escalating hate campaign. The situation has deteriorated significantly in 2024, with multiple murders, attacks on places of worship, and state-sanctioned discrimination further marginalizing this already vulnerable community.

### ***Religiously Motivated Murders***

In 2024, there has been a troubling rise in the number of targeted killings of Ahmadi Muslims, driven by religious hatred. **Four members of the community have been murdered** this year:

1. **Bahawalpur (March 2024):** Tahir Iqbal, the president of the local Ahmadiyya Community in Chak-84, was shot dead by two motorcyclists. The attack was religiously motivated, and the perpetrators have not been apprehended.
2. **Mandi Bahauddin (June 2024):** In Saadullahpur, two Ahmadi Muslims, Ghulam Sarwar (62) and Rahat Ahmad Bajwa (30), were murdered in separate incidents on the same day. The alleged perpetrator, a 16-year-old madrassa student, confessed to the killings, citing religious reasons. Both victims leave behind families, highlighting the devastating impact on the community.
3. **Gujrat (July 2024):** Zaka ur Rehman, a 53-year-old dentist, was killed in his clinic by two gunmen. This was the fourth faith-based killing of an Ahmadi in Pakistan this year, underscoring the lethal threat faced by community members in their daily lives.

These incidents reflect a broader pattern of violence against the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, fuelled by extremist rhetoric and a lack of legal protection. Despite the gravity of these crimes, there has been little to no accountability, with perpetrators often evading justice, thereby perpetuating a cycle of impunity.

### ***Violent Hate Speech***

On 7th September 2024, Pakistan marked 50 years since the constitutional amendment that declared the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community as non-Muslims, initiating decades of state-backed persecution. To commemorate this, the far-right religious party Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam (JUI-F) held a large gathering at Lahore's Minar-e-Pakistan, where several clerics, including Manzoor Mengal, delivered inflammatory speeches. Mengal repeatedly declared that Ahmadi Muslims are "Wajibul Qatl" (liable to be killed), stressing that if the state does not act, the public will in killing them. He further differentiated between non-believers, who can hold government positions, and apostates, such as Ahmadi Muslims, who he insisted must be killed. Mengal incited violence, calling on women to join in the killing of Ahmadi Muslims also, and warning the state that resistance to this agenda would be futile.

### ***Desecration of Mosques and Graves***

The persecution of Ahmadis extends beyond physical violence to include the desecration of their religious sites and burial grounds. **Since 2023 40 mosques have been attacked and since 2021 421 graves have been desecrated.** Latest incidents are:

1. **Musay Wala (January 2024):** Punjab police desecrated 65 tombstones in an Ahmadi graveyard, removing Islamic inscriptions. This act was ordered by a local official

known for his anti-Ahmadi stance, reinforcing concerns about systematic discrimination by state authorities.

2. **Kotli, Azad Jammu and Kashmir (February and June 2024):** Ahmadi mosques were attacked by mobs in two separate incidents. In February, extremists destroyed the minarets of a mosque in Bhabra, severely beating worshippers, including women. Despite police presence, no arrests were made. In June, a mob of 150 people attacked another mosque during Eid celebrations, ignoring government orders for enhanced security.
3. **Lahore (June 2024):** In a shocking incident, police officers in Lahore desecrated the minarets of an Ahmadi Muslim mosque in Jahman. The attack took place at 1:00 AM, with the police confiscating CCTV footage, further exacerbating fears of state complicity.

These acts of desecration not only violate the religious rights of Ahmadis but also serve as powerful symbols of the community's marginalization and the broader societal acceptance of anti-Ahmadi sentiment.

### ***Legal Discrimination***

#### *Voting Rights:*

The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community faces profound legal discrimination, particularly regarding their right to vote. Pakistan's electoral laws have long marginalized Ahmadis by enforcing a separate electoral register for them:

- *Context:* Since 1985, Ahmadi Muslims have been placed on a separate electoral list, forcing them to either renounce their faith to vote as Muslims or identify as non-Muslims, which contradicts their religious beliefs. This practice continues despite the abolition of separate voting blocs for Muslims and non-Muslims in 2002. .
- *Impact:* This discriminatory policy has disenfranchised Ahmadi Muslims for nearly 40 years.

#### *Mubarak Ahmad Sani Case and Escalating Hostility*

The persecution of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community has intensified following a ruling in February 2024, where Chief Justice Qazi Faez Esa bench ordered the release of Mubarak Ahmad Sani, an Ahmadi Muslim accused of distributing banned Ahmadi publications.

- **Case Summary:** Mr Sani had been charged under the Punjab Holy Quran (Printing and Recording) (Amendment) Act, 2021, for distributing Ahmadi books that were subsequently banned in Punjab. However, the court ruled that
  - the alleged offense took place in 2019 whereas it was not criminalised until 2021 so the case had no merit.
  - while that offence carried a maximum sentence of 6 months Mr Sani had already served more than a year in prison.
  - additional charges of blasphemy under S.295 were not valid as they were added after the FIR was issued and the FIR offered no support or vidence for such charges.

It therefore ruled that Mr Sani be released.

- **Backlash:** The ruling triggered a massive backlash from Islamist groups, particularly Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP). The group launched widespread protests, some of

which turned violent, and initiated a hate campaign against Justice Isa, including placing a bounty on his head.

- *Review:* The situation escalated in July 2024, when the Supreme Court under pressure from Islamist organisations conducted a review of the decision . The review upheld the earlier Supreme Court decision but as it noted that Ahmadis, as a minority group under the Pakistan Constitution, could practice and preach their faith in the privacy of their homes and places of worship.
- *Further hearing:* This was again picked up by extremists and further protests were held in Islamabad. The Punjab Government then petitioned for a correction that is normally reserved for minor amendments and this was turned into a call for the decision to be reversed. The Supreme Court upheld its decision but agreed to delete three paragraphs in the judgement to appease the extremists.
- **Impact:** A detailed judgement is awaited, but this has completely undermined the independence of the judiciary. The case has not only endangered the life of Justice Isa but has also exacerbated the already perilous situation for the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community as well as other minorities in Pakistan. The TLP's open hostility and threats of violence have created an environment where extremist actions against Ahmadi Muslim and their supporters are increasingly seen as justified.

### *Prisoners of Conscience*

1. **Hafiz Tariq Shehzad:** Booked on 26 May 2020, for sharing a WhatsApp message about a religious quiz; and remains incarcerated with his bail applications rejected.
2. **Malik Zaheer Ahmad:** Arrested on 30 September 2020, on fabricated charges, granted bail on 23 February 2021, but rearrested under another FIR upon expected release; his bail plea has been rejected by the Supreme Court.
3. **Mr. Shiraz Ahmad:** Booked on 20 June 2019, for creating a group and sharing Ahmadi Muslim content; arrested on 25 February 2021, with his bail plea subsequently rejected by the Supreme Court. 3.
4. **Mubashar Ranja:** Arrested during Eid –ul-Adha 2024 for partaking in Islamic act of animal sacrifice (Qurbani) during Eid.
5. Four Ahmadis (**Mr. Owais Ahmad, Mr. Muhamad Waqas, Mr. Sultan Ahmad and Mr. Muhammad Zaki** ) have been arrested in Narowal on 20 August for false allegations of blasphemy (details in Annex)

### *Recommendations*

#### **The UK Government is urged to call on the Pakistan Government to:**

1. Uphold the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary.
2. Release all Ahmadi Muslims held in prison under the draconian anti-Ahmadi and Blasphemy laws;
3. Urge the Government of Pakistan to ensure that Ahmadi Muslims have their democratic right to vote.
4. End the attacks on Ahmadi Muslims and on Ahmadi mosques and graves.
5. Ensure that all religious communities including Ahmadi Muslims have the full right to freedom of religion and Ahmadi Muslims can freely practice their faith as Muslims.
6. Ensure that hate preachers from Pakistan in particular are not allowed into the UK.



## Ahmadis Muslims Arrested in Narowal on Allegations of the Blasphemy

28 August 2024

- Mr. Owais Ahmad resident of Dharag, district Narowal has a Christian maid working in his house.
- On 19<sup>th</sup> August the maid cleaned the house and put some old papers in a shopping bag, that was placed outside the home by the family of Mr. Owais. The bag included a Part of the Holy Quran.
- In the evening a lady in his neighbours opened up the shopping bag and took the Chapter of the Holy Quran. She started shouting about it and the Clerics and a crowd started to gather at Dharag.
- Announcements were made from the mosques of Dharag that the Qadianis have done the Blasphemy of the Holy Quran and people need to gather to take the revenge of this Blasphemy.
- The Police also arrived and the local Community requested more Police who arrived.
- The Police upon the request of the opponents **registered a case** under FIR No. 482/24 under Section 295-B (The Blasphemy of the Holy Quran) and 109 (Assistance in any Crime) **against 4 Ahmadis** and have arrested them as well, they are:

**Mr. Owais Ahmad,**

**Mr. Muhamad Waqas,**

**Mr. Sultan Ahmad and**

**Mr. Muhammad Zaki**

- Opponents then alleged that these Ahmadis had thrown the waste and were trying to set it on fire including the Quranic verses. This is in the FIR and is **totally false**. The Holy Quran and the Chapter of Yaseen was provided by the Clerics while doing the Blasphemy of the Holy Quran themselves and handing it over to the Police.
- The situation in the village is tense and the Police is deployed there and the Police is raiding different homes.