

URGENT ACTION

HUMAN RIGHTS LAWYER SHOT DEAD IN HIS OFFICE

Prominent human rights defender and lawyer Rashid Rehman was shot dead in Multan, Pakistan on 7 May. The killing is likely linked to his legal representation of university teacher Junaid Hafeez who has been charged with blasphemy. The Pakistani authorities must bring the perpetrators to justice and drop all charges against Junaid Hafeez.

Well-known lawyer and a human rights defender **Rashid Rehman** was shot dead in front of colleagues in his office in the city of Multan, Punjab province, on 7 May. One of his associate advocates, and a client were also shot and seriously injured. A witness said two unknown young men entered Rashid Rehman’s office, which is inside the building of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) on the busy Kutcheri Road, and fired several shots. Rashid was hit by five bullets and died of his injuries in an ambulance on the way to the hospital.

Rashid Rehman had been associated with the HRCP for over 20 years and was a Punjab Regional Coordinator for Multan. Despite the risks and threats, Rehman took up the case of **Junaid Hafeez**, an English lecturer in Bahauddin Zakriya University in Multan. Junaid Hafeez was charged with blasphemy by a religious students’ group after he allegedly posted blasphemous comments on his Facebook page. During court hearings on 9 April Rehman was openly threatened by some men, including a lawyer for the prosecution, in the presence of the judge hearing the case against Junaid Hafeez. According to the HRCP the men said, “You will not come to court next time because you will not exist anymore.” The judge did nothing about these brazen threats so the HRCP sent a complaint to the Chief Minister of Punjab and Multan police requesting security for his protection; this not provided. The police have not even questioned the people issuing the death threats, despite the fact that Rehman identified who they were. Following the killing police in Chehlyak Multan registered a case against ‘unknown perpetrators’, even though the incident occurred in front of several witnesses. Police have yet to investigate the alleged culprits, who are believed to belong to an extremist religious group.

Please write immediately in English or Urdu or your own language urging the Pakistan authorities to:

- Urgently bring the individuals responsible for the killing of Rashid Rehman to justice in fair trials without recourse to the death penalty, ensuring witnesses and Rehman’s relatives and colleagues are adequately protected from harassment and abuse;
- Calling on them to immediately and unconditionally drop the charges against Junaid Hafeez and guarantee the safety of him, his family and his legal representatives, expressing concern that several individuals have been attacked and some killed following charges of blasphemy, including those who defend such cases;
- Expressing concern that the current blasphemy laws violate the right to freedom of thought and expression, conscience and religion, are used maliciously to settle personal disputes and target Muslims and religious minorities alike, and urging the government to amend or abolish the blasphemy laws to prevent this.

PLEASE SEND APPEALS BEFORE 30 JUNE 2014 TO:

Prime Minister of Pakistan
 Nawaz Sharif
 Prime Minister House, Pakistan
 Secretariat, Constitution Avenue,
 Islamabad, Pakistan
 Fax: +92519220404
 Email: info@pmo.gov.pk

Chief Minister, Punjab
 Mian Mohammad Shahbaz Sharif
 Chief Minister’s Office
 7, Club Road, GOR I
 Lahore, Pakistan
 Fax: +92 42 99204301
Salutation: Dear Chief Minister Sharif

Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

Also send copies to diplomatic representatives accredited to your country. Please insert local diplomatic addresses below:

Name Address 1 Address 2 Address 3 Fax Fax number Email Email address Salutation Salutation
 Please check with your section office if sending appeals after the above date.



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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Pakistan's blasphemy laws have fostered a climate of religiously motivated violence, leading to the persecution of religious minorities and Muslims alike. These laws are often used to make unfounded malicious accusations to settle personal scores in land and business disputes. The blasphemy laws are vaguely formulated and arbitrarily enforced by the police and judiciary in a way that amounts to harassment and persecution of both religious minorities and Muslims. People held in prison on blasphemy charges have been killed by fellow detainees or prison officials. Even outside prison, individuals accused of blasphemy have been killed by vigilante mobs.

"Defiling the name of the Prophet Mohammed" is a capital offence under Section 295-C of the Pakistan Penal Code, which states, "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 Mohammed (peace be upon him) shall be punished with death, or imprisonment for life, and shall also be liable to a fine". The Federal Shariat Court, whose tasks include reviewing laws to ensure they conform to Islamic doctrine, ruled in 1991 that anyone convicted of blasphemy should face the death penalty, not life imprisonment. It reaffirmed that ruling in a decision handed down in January 2014.

Articles 18 and 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights state that everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion, opinion and expression. International human rights law provides that any limitations placed on these freedoms should be only such as are prescribed by law as well as being necessary and proportionate for, among other things, the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

The UN Human Rights Committee, the expert body that oversees the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, noted in its General Comment No. 34, that "Prohibitions of displays of lack of respect for a religion or other belief system, including blasphemy laws, are incompatible with the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights]," except in specific circumstances where individuals are advocating "national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence" [Article 20 paragraph 2 of the Covenant]. Additionally the Committee said, "it would be impermissible for any such laws to discriminate in favour of or against one or certain religions or belief systems." Amnesty International opposes the death penalty unconditionally, in all cases and all countries, without exception, regardless of the crime for which the person was condemned or the execution method the state uses. The death penalty violates the right to life and is the ultimate cruel, inhuman and degrading punishment.

Name: Rashid Rehman

Gender: male

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