

Freedom of religion
or belief in 2024/25

STREETS OF FEAR



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Human Rights Commission of Pakistan

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ISBN 978-627-7602-64-2

Cover image: <https://www.dawn.com/news/791414/alleged-blasphemy-in-lahore-turns-ugly>

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

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Acknowledgements

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) is grateful to Usman Saeed for writing this report. We would like to thank Salman Farrukh and Halima Azhar for managing its production, Irfan Khan for editing the report, Farah Zia and Maheen Pracha for reviewing it, and Rida Fazal for designing the cover and layout.

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.



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Introduction

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion... to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

— Article 18, Universal Declaration of Human Rights

In Pakistan, religious minorities continue to face marginalization. The transgressions of their fundamental constitutional rights, mainly the 'right to profess, practice, and propagate' religion or faith under Article 20 of the Constitution, by the religious majority have pushed the minorities over the edge. Their exclusion and ongoing victimization have compelled the minorities to prefer living in tight-knit areas that sometimes resemble slums. This report, documenting the violations related to freedom of religion or belief (FORB) from 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2025, shows a picture as grim as in previous reports.

The violence against the minorities has increased. There have been numerous targeted killings of Ahmadis. In one instance, a man was lynched just a short distance from a sizeable contingent of police in the middle of a busy market of Pakistan's largest city. Places of worship have been partially or wholly demolished by law enforcement agencies, despite some of them having the protection of a high court verdict. Several incidents of grave desecration were reported from all over the country.

Most alarmingly, two individuals accused of blasphemy were extrajudicially killed by the police while they sought police protection from a hostile mob bent upon lynching them. This casts a shadow on our law enforcement agencies. Both victims were Muslims.

Christian and Hindu minority rights activists have repeatedly raised alarms about the forced conversion of young girls in Punjab and Sindh. This report cites numerous instances where the girls allegedly abducted or lured into leaving their homes were under 18, clearly violating the federal and provincial minimum age requirements for marriage. In some cases, there is a clear pattern of abducting girls and then coercing them into marriage after their conversion to Islam.

In the last quarter of 2024/25, the country watched live-streamed hearings of a writ petition filed by the parents of young men and

women who were allegedly honey-trapped into false blasphemy cases. The hearings revealed that the youngsters were criminally entrapped, allegedly with the collusion of Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) officials. Multiple attempts were made to disrupt the court's proceedings by a 'private entity' that the petitioners accused of conducting illegal arrests.

Hate speech has been on the rise. Death threats were directed at the chief justice of the Supreme Court when the court granted bail to an Ahmadi individual. An elected senator was publicly insulted, particularly by some pro-right-wing social media channels, which also questioned his patriotism when he spoke out in defence of religious minorities. The blatant ways in which these hateful comments were made were unsettling.

The United Nations and other human rights organizations have consistently expressed concerns about the treatment of minorities in Pakistan. Among those raising these concerns was the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) has specifically highlighted issues throughout the year through its press releases and fact-finding reports.

The report also notes with concern the tilt among the bar associations towards the right-wing forces as they continue to adopt positions favoured by the extreme religious parties over serious matters of fundamental human rights.

On the positive side, the federal government has passed the Child Marriage Restraint Act 2025, which establishes the minimum marriage age of 18 for both men and women. In another development, Punjab, Sindh, and Balochistan have joined Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in passing laws to establish research-based centres of excellence on countering violent extremism.

Methodology

In this fifth report of its kind on FORB-related violations, covering the 2024/25 period, HRCP has relied primarily on documents available in the public domain. These include news reports, articles, and reports commissioned by human rights organizations. In many instances, multiple sources describing a single event were consulted not only to establish the actual sequence of events but also to verify the accuracy of the reported information.

The problem with FORB-related abuses is that they often receive insufficient coverage in the mainstream media. For this reason, social media platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), YouTube, and WhatsApp were consulted, albeit with great caution to avoid compromising the integrity of the information.

To gain a first-hand understanding of the issues faced by minorities, human rights activists from those communities were interviewed. These activists have spent years collecting evidence and data related to the abuses of their rights. A senior human rights lawyer was also consulted to gain an understanding of the legal aspects of the issues and to make recommendations that are legally sound and practical.

Information from official sources remains sparse and incomplete; therefore, other sources were also consulted. Information and documents obtained from the minority community sources have been handled with great care.

Extrajudicial killings of persons accused of blasphemy

The horrific spate of extrajudicial killings of people accused of blasphemy in Pakistan highlights the government's ongoing failure to uphold its obligation to respect and protect human rights, including the right to life, freedom of religion or belief and prohibition of discrimination.

– Amnesty International¹

In September 2024, two men accused of blasphemy were killed while in police custody less than a week apart. One was inexplicably shot and killed in Mirpurkhas during an alleged police encounter, and the other was killed by a police constable inside a police station in Quetta. This pattern is troubling in a country that has already seen the murder of a provincial governor by a policeman responsible for his security.

Abdul Ali's case: Murdered in plain sight

On 12 September 2024, police constable Saad Khan Sarhadi gunned down Abdul Ali, a blasphemy suspect, inside the lockup of Cantonment Police Station in Quetta.²

The suspect, a resident of Kharotabad, a neighbourhood on the outskirts of Quetta, was detained after a video circulated in which he allegedly made offensive remarks about *khatam-e-nabuwat* [finality of prophethood]. A case was registered against him under Section 295-C after the video went viral.

A mob from religious parties, including the Tehreek-i-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), gathered outside the Kharotabad Police Station where the suspect was initially held. As the violent crowd demanded his custody, the police officials transferred him to the Cantonment Police Station, where the fatal incident happened. It was the first incident of its kind in Quetta, where a serving police officer killed a suspect facing blasphemy charges while in custody.

A few days after the killing, the deceased's family 'unconditionally pardoned' the killer of Abdul Ali. On the same day, two lawyers, including the president of the Quetta Bar Association, filed a bail application for the release of Sarhadi.³ In a show of support, some other lawyers also announced that they would plead Sarhadi's case free of charge. Senator Abdul Shакoor Ghabizai of JUI-F also announced he would cover all legal expenses.

Shahnawaz Kunbhar: Wrongfully accused and unjustly killed

The cleric who was instigating the mob was the one who had taught Shahnawaz how to read the Quran. He was aware of Shahnawaz's mental state, but that did not stop him.

— Kunbhar's cousin⁴

Fearing for his life, Dr Shahnawaz Kunbhar, an employee of the Civil Hospital, Umerkot, fled to Karachi on 17 September 2024, to escape being lynched by enraged protestors.⁵ A local cleric had accused him of uploading blasphemous content on social media. However, Kunbhar denied the accusations in a video message he uploaded from his hotel in Karachi.⁶

On 17 September, the law enforcement agencies arrested him in Karachi, which, according to the family, was voluntary since the police had assured him protection. Later, he was handed over to the Mirpurkhas police for transportation to Mirpurkhas. On 19 September, the police announced that Kunbhar had been killed in an encounter. The police officers responsible for the killing were hailed as heroes and were garlanded by the local community.⁷

The family of the deceased tried to bury his body in Jehanro, a small town 40 kilometres from Umerkot, but a large mob, armed with 'petrol and axes', gathered at the local graveyard and prevented them from doing so. The dead body was also mutilated by the mob when the family attempted to bury him on their ancestral land in the desert.

Following condemnation by civil society and human rights organizations, including HRCP and Amnesty International, an inquiry was conducted by a team led by a DIG of the Sindh police, which termed the alleged police encounter 'fake'.⁸ According to the report,

the Mirpurkhas police ‘killed [Kunbhar] in a managed encounter and tried to give it a legal cover but failed’.⁹

An independent inquiry conducted by the Sindh Human Rights Commission (SHRC) declared that ‘Dr Shahnawaz Kunbhar was wrongfully identified as the blasphemy suspect, an error likely stemming from systemic flaws in the FIR registration process.’¹⁰

The findings of the SHRC were confirmed by the FIA’s report, which provided a detailed account of events that occurred between Kunbhar’s arrest and his death. On 14 February 2025, the FIA submitted the final charge sheet in the case of Kunbhar’s alleged extrajudicial killing to an anti-terrorism court in Mirpurkhas.

The charge sheet challenged the police’s initial claim that Kunbhar had a weapon during the encounter. It stated that he was in police custody the entire time. The FIA charge sheet also found the police’s claims that Kunbhar had fired two shots to be false. The charge sheet indicated a well-coordinated murder, stating that some senior police officers were in constant contact with a local religious leader, whose associates worked closely with the Umerkot police team that initially arrested Kunbhar.¹¹

Violence against the Ahmadiyya community

We are alarmed by ongoing reports of violence and discrimination against the Ahmadiyya community in Pakistan. We urge Pakistani authorities to take immediate action to address this situation.

— United Nations independent experts¹²

Murders

Axed in a fit of rage, shot in cold blood, or lynched by a mob in a frenzy. The violence against the Ahmadis has steadily increased during the reporting period. Briefly narrated below is a litany of violent crimes leading to the murder of Ahmadi citizens of Pakistan that appear to be religiously motivated. In two instances, the slain men were office bearers of the Jamaat-e-Ahmadiyya. Most disturbingly, in a case of mob lynching, there was a sizeable contingent of the law enforcement agencies nearby, yet the man could not be saved.

Lala Musa, 26 July 2024. Zakaur Rahman, 53-year-old father of four and a local official of the Jamaat-e-Ahmadiyya, was killed in his dental clinic in Lalamusa when an assailant entered the clinic and shot him in the upper body.¹³ Reports indicate that he had been receiving threats for several months, particularly since the Eid holiday.

Rawalpindi, 5 December 2024. Forty-year-old Tayyab Ahmad was hacked to death in Rawalpindi by an axe-wielding man.¹⁴ The victim's brother, Tahir Ahmad, who was also attacked but survived, had recently moved his family out of Rawalpindi for safety after receiving several threats.

Naukot, 13 December 2024. Amir Hasan, a local community leader of Jamat-e-Ahmadiyya, was murdered when he was returning home from an Ahmadi place of worship after offering morning prayers.¹⁵ According to reports, two unidentified persons on a motorbike opened fire on him after verifying his identity. He received fatal bullet wounds to his chest and died instantly.

Karachi, 18 April 2025. Forty-six-year-old Laeq Cheema was lynched by a mob of TLP supporters in Karachi's Saddar area.¹⁶ Cheema was beaten so severely that he succumbed to his wounds before he could be taken to the hospital. The activists had besieged an Ahmadi place of worship, as they had been doing every Friday across the country, to stop the community from performing their religious rituals. The lynching happened a short distance from where the police had been stationed to prevent such an incident.

The victim was a key witness in a pending court case against TLP activists accused of attacking the Ahmadi place of worship in 2023. According to the police, one of the six culprits who beat Cheema to death was the elected Union Council chairman of Kharadar, who had contested and won on a TLP ticket.

Kasur, 24 April 2025. Muhammad Asif, 19, was killed, and his cousin was seriously injured when five men opened fire on them.¹⁷ According to the police, one suspect was a TLP member who had tried to use religious sentiments to settle personal scores in an earlier incident. Reportedly, a campaign against the Ahmadiyya place of worship had been ongoing in the area for a long time, and harassment had been reported.

Sargodha, 16 May 2025. Dr. Mahmood Sheikh, 58, was shot on the staircase of the private hospital where he worked by a young man disguised as a janitor.¹⁸ The senior gastroenterologist who belonged to the Ahmadi community was rushed to the district headquarters hospital, where he breathed his last.

Victimization of Ahmadis during Eid

HRCP fears that this continued institutionalized discrimination against the Ahmadiyya community will empower vigilante actors and extremist groups to enforce a de facto ban on the community's freedom of movement and public participation.

— Human Rights Commission of Pakistan¹⁹

As Eid al-Azha 2024 approached, efforts to prevent the Ahmadiyya community from performing their Eid rituals, including animal sacrifices, intensified. Several bar associations, including the Lahore High Court Bar Association, along with a far-right religious party,

issued a series of letters urging law enforcement agencies to stop the community from practicing their Eid rituals.²⁰

As reported by Amnesty International, the members of the Ahmadiyya community in Chakwal, Narowal, Toba Tek Singh, Khanewal, and Faisalabad districts were directed to submit affidavits and indemnity bonds, affirming that they would not sacrifice animals on Eid al-Azha.²¹ The signed affidavits stated that ‘violation of the terms would lead to fines of up to PKR 500,000 or open the signatories to legal sanction under the Pakistan Penal Code.’

Desecration of religious sites and graves

According to the data provided by the Ahmadiyya community, 29 Ahmadi places of worship were attacked and damaged during the review period. In 26 cases, the law enforcement agencies carried out the demolition. These incidents occurred in Okara, Khanewal, Gujranwala, Sialkot, Vehari, Sheikhupura, Gujrat, and Sargodha, among other locations.

In a landmark 2023 Lahore High Court ruling, the court stated that Sections 298-B and 298-C of the PPC do not mandate the structures of the Ahmadiyya places of worship built before 1984 to be ‘razed or altered.’²² However, a historic place of worship in Sialkot district was demolished by the authorities on the night of 16 January 2025.²³ According to a press release by the Jamaat-e-Ahmadiyya, the place of worship, which was built before 1947 by Sir Zafarullah Khan, Pakistan’s first foreign minister, was ‘reduced to rubble in what appears to have been a coordinated effort.’²⁴

In yet another apparent violation of the High Court’s verdict, the Gujranwala police destroyed the minarets at two Ahmadi places of worship on 11 October 2024.²⁵ Both structures were built in 1953 and 1954, respectively. According to the Ahmadiyya community, they had previously informed the police about the 2023 Lahore High Court ruling, but the police ignored it and proceeded with the demolition.

As was the case last year, hundreds of Ahmadi graves were vandalized across Pakistan during the reporting period in blatant acts of hatred against the minority. In one such case, unidentified individuals destroyed the headstones of Ahmadi graves in an enclosed graveyard in Kotli (AJK) on 21 March 2025.²⁶ As many as 76 gravestones were damaged and desecrated.

Forced conversions

The pattern of non-Muslim minor girls going missing and then reappearing after a few days, having converted to Islam and married a Muslim man, has persisted in 2024/25. Hindus in Sindh, who make up 8.8 percent of the province's population, and Christians, who constitute 1.9 percent in Punjab, have repeatedly raised this issue.

An HRCP fact-finding study on the migration of Hindus from Sindh to India and other destinations found forced conversions and coerced marriages to be a persistent issue in Sindh.²⁷ It emphasized that the problem is more evident among the Scheduled Caste Hindus who are 'especially vulnerable, given their lower socioeconomic status and limited social mobility, exacerbating their plight.'

The report especially mentioned the role of Mian Abdul Haq, also known as Mian Mithu, a local politician and Muslim cleric, who is 'accused of leveraging his influence to facilitate the forced conversions and marriages of underage Hindu girls'. His seminary, Dargah Bharchundi Shareef in Daharki, Ghotki, is a key location where many such conversions have reportedly occurred. In 2022, the controversial pir was added to the British government's sanctions list.²⁸

According to a veteran human rights activist from the Christian community in Punjab, the issue of forced conversion is much more complicated: 'It is not merely a religious issue but also economic and social as the minorities, especially the Christians, belong to the lowest rung of society.' According to him, the underage Christian girls constitute the bulk of those converting to Islam. In such cases, the police are often perceived as siding with the abductor. 'They now say that since the girl has converted to Islam, it would be *haram* to send her back. Even if the FIR is filed, the parents are threatened so severely that they give up their claim to their daughter,' he says.

In July 2024, Laiba Suhail, a minor Christian girl who was allegedly kidnapped about five months earlier, was recovered and returned to her parents in Faisalabad.²⁹ The girl was abducted in February 2024 by Irfan Maseh and his five accomplices, who later handed her over to Shafqat Shah. Shah forcibly converted Laiba to Islam and married her.

Several police investigation teams confirmed that Laiba was

underage and that her nikah with Shah was illegal. Alina, another girl of similar age, has not been as fortunate as Laiba; her parents await the day she will be returned to them (see Box 1).

In January 2025, a man and his wife appeared before an additional sessions judge of Mirpurkhas on Thursday for protection after the SHRC asked the district police to take action against the couple for 'forced conversion of the underage woman and their illegal marriage.'³⁰

Fourteen-year-old Chahat, a Hindu girl, went missing in Quetta in April 2025.³¹ A few days after her disappearance, Chahat claimed by a video message to have converted to Islam and married of her own free will. However, Chahat's parents presented her birth certificate and B-Form to prove she was well below Balochistan's legal marriage age of 16.

In May 2025, the Hindu Panchayats of Daharki, Ghotki, Rohri, and Sukkur, along with a minority councillor, Ameet Kumar, strongly reacted to the disappearance of a teenage Meghwar girl from her village in Rohri taluka and demanded her immediate recovery.³² They feared she might have been abducted for forced conversion.

In June 2025, the SHRC, along with civil society groups and the Hindu Panchayat Larkana, expressed serious concern over the alleged forced religious conversions of three minor girls and one teenage boy from a Hindu family in Shahdadpur.³³ They called for protective and legal measures to safeguard the minors and their family.

Box 1: Alina's ordeal

In Alina's case, we pleaded with the deputy commissioner and the police. We argued with the doctors regarding the determination of her age. We contacted the National Commission for Human Rights. We knocked on the doors of the Islamabad High Court twice. We have exhausted all available forums, and the matter is now before the Supreme Court.

— Safdar Chaudhry, human rights activist leading the case for Alina's recovery

Alina, now 15, experienced a particularly tumultuous year, marked by her disappearance from her home, subsequent recovery from the residence

of her abductor, placement under the custody of the Child Protection Unit, and then return to the same individual accused of abducting her. Here is a brief chronological story of Alina's life compiled with the help of details provided by the human rights activists pursuing her case:

13 March 2010. Alina Khalid is born into the impoverished household of Khalid Masih. A copy of NADRA's B-Form, her Grade V result card issued by the Federal Directorate of Education and a certificate issued by Our Lady of Fatima Church, Islamabad, confirm the date.

24 June 2024. Alina goes missing. Her parents accuse Haider Ali, a local butcher, of abducting her. Whether she was forcibly taken or lured away cannot be determined.

25 June 2024. An FIR is registered following the family's persistence despite the local police's initial reluctance. Haider Ali and another individual are identified in the FIR as suspects in Alina's abduction.

25 June 2024. Alina converts to Islam. The only evidence of her change of religion is a copy of her conversion certificate, signed by Hafiz Muhammad, khateeb and nikah registrar. No name of a seminary or mosque is mentioned on the document.

25 June 2024. Alina is married to Haider Ali. The *nikahnama* mentions her age as 19 without any reference to her CNIC. The document is signed by Hafiz Muhammad in his capacity as the *nikah* registrar.

10 July 2024. A case for Alina's recovery is filed with the Islamabad High Court under Article 199.

28 July 2024. Alina is recovered by the police.

29 July 2024. After appearing before an assistant commissioner, Alina is placed in the custody of the Child Protection Unit in Islamabad.

12 September 2024. Another writ petition is filed in the Islamabad High Court to hand Alina over to her parents.

13 September 2024. Alina is returned to Haider Ali.

18 September 2024. The writ petition in the IHC is dismissed.

An appeal under reference 5358/24 against the High Court's decision has been pending in the Supreme Court of Pakistan for eight months, awaiting a hearing.

Misuse of the blasphemy laws

Each FIR disrupts a life, and for those accused, every day in prison is fraught with fear – not only of unjust charges but of possible vigilante attacks from other prisoners who may see themselves as enforcers of extrajudicial punishment. These individuals face a grim reality where prolonged trials can take decades to conclude, leaving them in a perpetual state of vulnerability and despair.

– National Commission for Human Rights³⁴

Far too often, the blasphemy law has been misused to settle personal scores or seek financial gain in Pakistan, where, as noted in a recent report by the Human Rights Watch, ‘mere accusation of blasphemy can be a death sentence.’³⁵ The report also stated that ‘Blasphemy accusations against Christians and Ahmadis have long incited mob violence and forced entire communities to flee their homes. Often, that forced flight leaves their property up to be seized.’

Although false accusations continued during the reporting period, many were acquitted by the courts, further confirming the malicious intent behind these charges. In October 2024, sisters Saima and Sonia, who had been accused of blasphemy about two months earlier, were released on bail by a Toba Tek Singh sessions court after reviewing the evidence.³⁶ The women, from a village in Tehsil Gujra, were charged with discarding a sack containing sacred inscriptions into an empty plot.

Two men, condemned to death on blasphemy charges in separate cases, were acquitted by the higher judiciary. In February 2025, the Lahore High Court acquitted Sajid Ali, who was previously sentenced to death on blasphemy charges, citing insufficient evidence and inconsistencies in witness testimonies.³⁷ Similarly, in June 2025, the Supreme Court ended Anwar Kenneth’s 23-year-long ordeal after a three-judge bench acquitted him on the grounds of being of unsound mind.³⁸ In 2002, Anwar Kenneth was sentenced to death under Section 295-C of the Pakistan Penal Code and fined five million rupees.

In June 2025, a 25-year-old Christian man named Farhan Masih from Sahiwal was acquitted of blasphemy charges against him under Sections 295-A and 298-A of the Pakistan Penal Code and Section 7 of the Anti-Terrorism Act 1997. The trial judge ruled that the prosecution failed to prove its case beyond a reasonable doubt. Farhan, a mentally ill and impoverished Christian, was charged under anti-terrorism laws and spent nearly five months in prison.³⁹

'Blasphemy business' group and allegations of entrapment

Alarmed by rising complaints regarding the 'entrapment of young individuals on blasphemy charges,' following a report of the Punjab police's Special Branch issued in January 2024, the National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) conducted a year-long investigation into the matter.⁴⁰ The commission visited different jails and interviewed 'hundreds of inmates incarcerated under alleged blasphemy charges.' It also met with the families of the accused and representatives from law enforcement agencies. According to the report, the 'detainees hailed from various provinces, underscoring the widespread impact of this disturbing trend.'

Released in November 2024, the report revealed a 'troubling trend' of a dramatic increase in registration of blasphemy cases, the majority of which were initiated by the FIA's cybercrime unit, frequently in 'collaboration with a private entity.' According to the report, in these cases, 'due process was notably disregarded.' Arrests were often carried out by 'private individuals' instead of law enforcement agencies. There were reports of 'torture both during apprehension and immediately afterward.' Detainees' written statements were frequently obtained 'under duress, compromising the legitimacy of their content.' Legal aid and support for the accused were 'systematically obstructed and, in some instances, actively threatened.'

As proof of how frivolously the investigations were conducted, the report points to the case of the arrest of a young man, languishing in Adiala Jail, Rawalpindi. This man was declared legally blind five months before his arrest, but was implicated, apparently based on concocted evidence. The report further stated that the detainees were coerced by 'the private actors involved in their entrapment' to engage in further criminal activities within the prison. Among a list of recommendations, the NCHR suggested the constitution of a joint

investigation team comprising 'high-ranking officials' from different government departments, including law enforcement and intelligence agencies, to investigate the matter.

In September 2024, a writ petition signed by the relatives of the young men and women who faced hardship was filed at the Islamabad High Court. In March 2025, the court decided to live-stream its proceedings.⁴¹

The state of prisoners accused of blasphemy

According to data available on the official website of the Punjab prisons department, the total number of inmates in blasphemy cases was 729 on 17 June 2025. Of these, 51 were females and two were juveniles (under 18 years old). The total number of under-trial prisoners was 679, with 48 being women. Thirty-nine men were convicted. Nineteen were unconfirmed condemned, including two women, while two men were confirmed condemned.

The figures from other provinces regarding those accused of blasphemy were not readily available on their websites. However, previous studies show that the majority of the blasphemy-related prison population was held in Punjab's prisons.

Most studies by human rights agencies, including those conducted by HRCP and the NCHR, depict a grim picture of the living conditions in Pakistan's prisons. Those accused of blasphemy face an even worse situation. Out of fear of attacks from other inmates, they are housed together either in a single barrack or in the same cells. The burgeoning number of people arrested on blasphemy-related charges has shrunk the physical space for them in already overcrowded prisons.

Systemic violence and discrimination

Campaign targeting Ismaili butchers in Chitral

On 23 May 2025, HRCP expressed grave concern over a decision by the local administration in Garam Chashma, Chitral, to ban Ismaili butchers from selling meat in the area.⁴²

'All Pakistani citizens have equal constitutional rights, regardless of their sectarian affiliation,' read a post by the HRCP on X (formerly Twitter). The administration had imposed a ban after some Sunni religious leaders had declared that the meat sold by Ismaili butchers was un-Islamic.

Mainstream media's apathy towards FORB issues

Like previous years, the mainstream media's indifference to matters related to the freedom of religion or belief continued. One major issue that directly impacted around 400 households in the country and should be of great concern for the unsuspecting young Pakistanis was the Islamabad High Court's hearings related to the so-called 'blasphemy business group'.

Although the case was livestreamed online for approximately four months, there was minimal coverage of the hearings in print and digital media. Nor was there much meaningful discussion about the issue, aside from a few television shows. Similarly, incidents where minorities had the most reason to be upset, like coerced marriages, enforced conversions and violence against the minorities, also struggled to make headlines.

On the limited media coverage of a press conference by the family members of the victims of the blasphemy business group, a senior journalist wrote, 'Disturbingly but perhaps unsurprisingly, the press conference got little attention in our national media (I have seen no reports on TV and only one in print) and even the original special branch report was only covered by the independent media outlet FactFocus.'⁴³

Pressure from right-wing forces on the judiciary and elected officials

A worrying trend has emerged in the country, with ultra-right-wing groups increasingly pressuring the judiciary and the elected officials through propaganda and direct threats. In July 2024, Pir Zaheerul Hasan Shah, the vice-emir of the TLP, was booked in a terrorism case for the incitement of violence against Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa after the Supreme Court upheld its February 2024 verdict to grant bail to Mubarak Sani in a revised judgment.⁴⁴

Sani, an Ahmadi man, was booked for a crime he allegedly committed in 2019 before it was criminalized by an amendment in 2021. The right-wing groups were outraged by the Supreme Court's verdict and launched a campaign condemning the top Judge of the apex Court. On 23 August 2024, in an unprecedented move, the Supreme Court issued a second revision of its original judgment and 'expunged' the paragraphs it deemed objectionable to the politico-religious groups.⁴⁵

On 24 June 2025, HRCP issued a strongly worded statement on X (formerly Twitter) to condemn 'the inflammatory language used by a far-right group against Senator Pervaiz Rasheed, labelling an elected representative a 'traitor' for defending freedom of religion or belief for all citizens.'⁴⁶ A few days earlier, Senator Rasheed made a speech in the Senate in which he had condemned the alleged police investigation of an elderly woman's religious beliefs during Eid al-Azha.

Pro-far-right stances by bar associations

The positions taken by different bar associations on sensitive religious matters reveal a strong leaning towards ultra-conservative or right-wing forces. In June 2025, a resolution unanimously passed by the Mansehra District Bar Association barred its members from appearing in court cases involving individuals accused of blasphemy or desecration of the Holy Quran.⁴⁷ The HRCP denounced this development, stating it was 'in direct violation of the fundamental principle of due process, which guarantees every person the right to a fair trial and legal representation, regardless of the charges they face.'⁴⁸ Fortunately, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Bar Council rejected the resolution from the Mansehra District Bar Association on the grounds that it went 'against the spirit of Article 10-A of the Constitution, which guarantees the right to a fair trial.'⁴⁹

Legislation to counter violent extremism

Harmful narratives, mis- and disinformation, and hate speech legitimizing extremist ideologies can fuel violent extremism... Governments, civil society actors, regional organizations, and media representatives all have a key role to play in strategic communications efforts to ensure information integrity online and offline and address hate speech conducive to violent extremism.

— United Nations Global Programme on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism⁵⁰

In its report on the extrajudicial killing of a blasphemy accused doctor in Mirpurkhas, the SHRC highlighted the 'failures of relevant stakeholders to address religious extremism.'⁵¹ It emphasized that the persistence of hate speech and incitement reflects a significant failure in the enforcement of Pakistan's Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) framework.

The reporting period of this study has been marked by a notable development, where the provincial assemblies of Balochistan, Sindh, and Punjab passed laws to establish provincial centres of excellence for conducting research and developing policies and strategies to counter violent extremism. Among their key functions is working with 'faith-based organizations and religious leaders to counter the abuse of religion by violent extremists and to prevent hate crimes.'

Recommendations

- The federal government should establish an inquiry commission based on the findings of the Special Branch of Punjab Police and the NCHR's November 2024 report under section 3 of the Pakistan Commission of Inquiry Act 2017, which authorizes the federal government to create a Commission of Inquiry to investigate 'any definite matter of public importance.'
- The provincial assemblies of Balochistan, Punjab, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa should prioritize passing laws that set the minimum marriage age for both men and women at 18, ensuring uniformity in the age of marriage across Pakistan. According to reports, these bills are at various stages of review in the respective provincial legislatures.
- The authorities should monitor the seminaries frequently involved in the conversion of underage girls. Moreover, the change of religion should be conducted either in court or in the presence of a government official.
- Law enforcement forces in Pakistan need to be better equipped to protect individuals from mob violence and lynching. Vital police training in intelligence gathering, crowd management, reading early signals of riots, and community policing is essential. Moreover, swift action should be taken against those who instigate the mobs and lead them to criminal actions.
- The unchecked spread of hatred against minorities and those who do not conform to the far-right version of the majority religion must be addressed. The state should ensure that all incitements to violence, especially on social media, face legal consequences without infringing on the right to free speech as protected by Article 19 of the Constitution of Pakistan.
- The extrajudicial killings of individuals accused of blasphemy by the police raise serious concerns about the integrity and functioning of Pakistan's law enforcement agencies. Concrete steps should be taken to eliminate unscrupulous elements within these forces by enhancing departmental accountability.
- The police and FIA should receive comprehensive training in human rights, constitutional safeguards and Pakistan's obligations under international law. This should include a specific

focus on FORB, including the prohibition of arbitrary arrests, harassment, and discriminatory practices against religious minorities and proper procedures for handling complaints of hate speech, forced conversions and attacks on places of worship.

- No place of worship should be demolished without explicit court orders and due process of law. Those who attempt to desecrate a place of worship should be apprehended and prosecuted according to the law.
- Law enforcement agencies should not have the authority to verify a person's faith by making them recite the *kalma* or holy verses. The information about a person's faith recorded in the NADRA database should suffice.
- The centres of excellence envisaged in the provincial CVE laws should be operational as soon as possible.
- Interfaith committees should be made more effective and remain active throughout the year, not just during religious events. These committees should have a visible presence in areas with diverse religious communities.
- Law enforcement agencies must ensure that the loudspeakers of places of worship are not used for delivering hate speech.
- Bar associations and religious groups should not be permitted to pressure the police into acting against a specific sect or minority.
- Judicial and government authorities must enforce the 2014 Supreme Court ruling and other relevant Supreme Court precedents related to religious freedoms.
- The authorities should ensure the safety of all minority worship sites and quickly reopen the 29 Ahmadi places of worship in Karachi, along with numerous other sites that have been shut down due to an alleged threat to public order.
- Due to the seriousness of a blasphemy charge, officials of a higher rank should conduct investigations under PPC section 295-C.
- As recommended in the previous FORB report, the government must establish an independent statutory national commission dedicated to the rights of minorities, ensuring equal representation for all religious communities.
- A public awareness campaign focused on educating the public

about sensitive laws involving capital punishment and the concept of entrapment, particularly in the modern digital age, should be thoroughly carried out. Additionally, the public should be kept informed about the continually evolving cyber laws.

- Mainstream media should recognize its responsibility to all segments of society, including marginalized groups. It must highlight issues that significantly affect religious minorities in the country.
- The syllabi of schools, especially at the elementary level, should be evaluated with the consideration that they do not sow the seed of religious bigotry in young minds.

Endnotes

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