

Blasphemy Laws Exposed:

The Consequences of Criminalizing “Defamation of Religions”

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FOR OVER A DECADE, efforts have been made in several venues at the United Nations to promote the concept that States have an obligation to adopt and enforce laws against the “defamation of religions.” Some of the countries that support these efforts already have such legislation in place in the form of blasphemy or similar laws that prohibit injuring religious sentiments or insulting religious figures and leaders. Those who support the concept of “defamation of religions” argue that prohibitions such as these are necessary to fight incitement to discrimination, hostility, and violence, as well as to protect freedom of religion. But the facts tell a very different story.

Such laws risk promoting an atmosphere of intolerance by providing a context in which governments can restrict freedom of expression, thought, and religion, and can result in devastating consequences for those holding religious views that differ from the majority religion, as well as for adherents to minority faiths. The loose and unclear language of these laws empowers majorities against dissenters and the state against individuals. Governments and individuals frequently abuse national blasphemy laws not only to stifle dissent and debate, but to harass rivals, legitimize violence, and settle petty disputes.

It was thus a much welcomed step when in March 2011, the United Nations Human Rights Council adopted a resolution by consensus entitled “Combating intolerance, negative stereotyping and stigmatization of, and discrimination, incitement to violence

and violence against persons based on religion or belief.” Resolution 16/18 ceases to provide cover for national blasphemy laws and charts a new course. The resolution omits any reference to “defamation of religions” and—in accordance with international standards—focuses on the protection of individuals, rather than the protection of abstract ideas and religions. Recognizing the positive role that the “open, constructive and respectful debate of ideas can play in combating religious hatred, incitement and violence,” it calls for “strengthened international efforts to promote tolerance and peace based on respect for human rights and the diversity of religions and beliefs.”¹ The resolution further recognizes the importance of leaders speaking out against intolerance and values expanding human rights education and interfaith and intercultural efforts to raise awareness. The United Nations General Assembly endorsed the approach of the Human Rights Council in December 2011, and then in March 2012 the Human Rights Council once again adopted a similar text.

As a follow-up to Resolution 16/18, the United States government hosted the first of a series of ongoing meetings in December 2011 called “The Istanbul Process.” International experts were invited to share best practices on how to fight discrimination based on religion or belief. The focus of the gathering was to enhance international and technical expertise on challenges that law enforcement officials and other national experts face when tackling conflict prevention and religious intolerance.

Notwithstanding international goodwill gestures exemplified by Resolution 16/18, human rights abuses that stem from blasphemy laws continue throughout the world. In 2011 and the early part of 2012, there have been a number of serious instances of religious intolerance, hatred, and discrimination, many of which resulted from actions deemed “blasphemous” by communities or authorities.

Accusations of blasphemy have resulted in arrests and arbitrary detentions and have sparked assaults, murders, and mob attacks. In February 2011, more than one thousand protestors stormed a District Court in Indonesia after a Christian found guilty of blasphemy received what extremists believed to be a too lenient sentence.² The sentence was for five years—the maximum penalty allowed under the criminal code. That same month, more than one thousand Indonesian villagers armed with machetes and sticks stormed a house of worship of Ahmadiyya, a minority Muslim sect whose very existence is deemed blasphemous under Indonesian law. Three people were killed and six others wounded. The attackers were videotaped stoning their victims to death while police officers and villagers watched and did nothing to stop the bloodshed. The perpetrators of such violence received sentences of three to six months—and none were charged with murder. The same court found an Ahmadi victim whose hand was nearly severed during the attack guilty of disobeying police orders and sentenced him to six months in prison.

Journalists, bloggers, teachers, students, poets, religious converts, Internet users and others have been targeted, charged, and sentenced to prison or received other punishments for exercising their right to freedom of expression. In February 2012, a 23-year-old journalist from Saudi Arabia, Hamza Kashgari, was accused of blasphemy and may face the death penalty after he posted a string of Twitter messages of an imaginary conversation with the Prophet Muhammad. Within hours of his postings,

more than 30,000 people responded to his tweets, many calling for him to be punished. On Facebook, more than 12,000 people called for Kashgari’s execution. On January 17, 2012, the Iranian Supreme Court confirmed the death sentence of Saeed Malekpour, a 35-year-old web designer and resident of Canada who had returned to Iran to visit his dying father in 2008. Saeed was convicted of “insulting and desecrating Islam” after writing a computer program that was used by others, without his permission, to download pornography. On September 24, 2011, a Christian eighth grade student in Pakistan was expelled from school after she unintentionally misspelt a word on an exam and now faces blasphemy charges.

Those accused of blasphemy are at risk before, during, and after their trials. Bail is often denied. Legal proceedings can take years, while those accused languish in jails where some have been reportedly subject to mistreatment or even torture. A number of accused have been killed while in prison.

Even when acquitted, those charged with blasphemy are marked for life and may have had to live in hiding or seek exile. Due to death threats and verbal and physical attacks, lawyers are often reluctant to take on blasphemy cases. Those that do, along with the judges that decide them, have been subject to intimidation, death threats, and violence.

In July 2010, two Pakistani brothers accused of defaming the Prophet Muhammad were shot to death by unidentified gunmen as they emerged from a courthouse where they had been cleared of all blasphemy charges. Hadi Saeed Al Muti of Saudi Arabia has been in jail since January 1994. He was convicted of making an offensive remark about the Prophet Muhammad while attending a police training camp when he was just 18 years old. After being held in the mental ward of a Pakistani prison for 14 years without a trial, 60-year-old Zaibun Nisa was released on July 20, 2010. Nisa, who is mentally ill, was accused by a cleric of throwing torn pages

from the Koran down a drain in 1996. No evidence linked her to the incident.

The assassinations of Pakistani Governor Salmaan Taseer on January 4, 2011, and Minority Affairs Minister Shahbaz Bhatti on March 2, 2011, illustrate how deadly the debate over blasphemy laws has become. Both men were murdered because they spoke out in favor of reforming abusive blasphemy laws and specifically against the proposed death sentence of Asia Bibi, a Christian farm laborer convicted of blasphemy following a disagreement with a Muslim coworker. Asia Bibi remains in solitary confinement while awaiting word on her appeal. Her family is in constant fear for their lives and an imam has offered a \$6,000 reward to anyone who takes Bibi's life if her death sentence is not upheld.

As a result of these murders, the serious debate that had commenced to reform Pakistan's blasphemy laws has been largely stifled. Religious groups and political parties pressured the government to withdraw the bill proposing amendments to the blasphemy law. Following the arrest of Governor Taseer's murderer, police officers investigating the case were threatened—as were lawyers representing the state. Justice Pervaiz Shah, who presided over the murder trial, was forced to go on leave for an indefinite period of time after receiving death threats.³ Those who hoped to organize public events to honor Salmaan Taseer were discouraged, and decrees were issued against offering funeral prayers. Meanwhile, the murderer was treated like a hero, showered by rose petals outside the court house where lawyers rallied in his defense.

In this report, Human Rights First has documented over one hundred recent cases which demonstrate the gross abuse of national laws that criminalize the defamation of religions and enable governments to target individuals for the peaceful expression of political or religious views.

These cases demonstrate how blasphemy and related laws:

- ◊ **Stifle Discussion and Dissent in the Public Sphere**
- ◊ **Spark Outbreaks of Mob Violence**
- ◊ **Violate Freedom of Religion, Thought, or Belief**
- ◊ **Are Used as a Weapon to Settle Private Disputes**

Human Rights First recognizes that some of these cases involve speech and acts that may be characterized as offensive. Nonetheless, much can and should be done to confront problems of intolerance, discrimination, and violence without restricting speech. Rather than creating new international norms that restrict freedom of expression, Human Rights First has developed specific recommendations to identify and advance steps that can be taken by governments, political leaders, and public officials, to confront the global problems of hate speech and the climate of hostility that may accompany violence—without prohibiting free expression.⁴

I. Blasphemy Laws Used to Stifle Discussion and Dissent in the Public Sphere: Literature, Media, and the Internet

Blasphemy laws provide a context in which governments can prevent the peaceful expression of political or religious views, including those on the role of religion in law, society, and the state. By restricting these essential freedoms in the name of protecting religion from defamation, governments are able to stifle the healthy debate and discussion of ideas and essentially determine which ideas are acceptable and which are not. Teachers and students, clergy and congregants, writers and journalists, web and social media users have suffered prosecution under national blasphemy and related laws for exercising their right to freedom of expression.

- **Bangladesh:** On March 21, 2012, the Dhaka High Court ordered authorities to shut down five Facebook pages and a website shortly after a joint petition was

filed by Dhaka University professors who alleged that the content contained “disparaging remarks and cartoons about the Prophet Muhammad, the Muslim holy book of Koran, Jesus, Lord Buddha, and Hindu Gods.”⁵ This was the first time that Facebook pages have been blocked on charges of “hurting religious sentiment.”

- **Pakistan:** On February 28, 2012, a Pakistani attorney filed a petition against four Danish citizens for uploading blasphemous material in Denmark that could be viewed on the Internet in Pakistan.⁶
- **Egypt:** In February 2012, Makram Diab, a Christian school secretary, was sentenced to six years in prison for “insulting the Prophet” while a mob of 2,500 Muslims rallied outside the courthouse, some demanding he be sentenced to death. The crowds prevented the defense lawyer from entering the courtroom and prevented the judge from leaving. The charges stemmed from a dispute between Diab and a teacher.⁷
- **Saudi Arabia:** In February 2012, 23-year-old journalist Hamza Kashgari was accused of blasphemy after he posted a string of Twitter messages in which he imagined himself speaking with the Prophet Muhammad. Kashgari wrote, “On your birthday, I will say that I have loved the rebel in you, that you’ve always been a source of inspiration to me, and that I do not like the halos of divinity around you. I shall not pray for you.” Within hours of his postings, more than 30,000 people responded to his tweets, many calling for him to be punished. On Facebook, more than 12,000 people called for his execution. Kashgari deleted the Twitter messages and issued an apology but to no avail. Fearing for his safety, he fled to Malaysia in the hopes of travelling on to New Zealand. On orders of Saudi Arabia’s King Abdullah, Kashgari was arrested and returned home where he potentially faces the death penalty if convicted. The public prosecutor in Jeddah has reportedly said that he also plans to bring charges against Saudis who “supported or encouraged Kashgari’s stance” on Twitter. The Saudi Information Minister instructed all local newspapers and magazines not to publish any articles written by Kashgari.⁸
- **Iran:** On January 17, 2012, the Supreme Court confirmed the death sentence of Saeed Malekpour, a 35-year-old web designer and resident of Canada who had returned to Iran to visit his dying father in 2008. Saeed was convicted of “insulting and desecrating Islam” after writing a computer program that was used by others, without his permission, to download pornography. Malekpour has been held in solitary confinement for more than a year.⁹
- **Bangladesh:** On January 4, 2012, Yunus Ali, the principal of a technical college, was arrested for keeping a copy of the novel *Lajja*, (“Shame”), by Taslimia Nasrin in the school library. The book, which tells the story of the life of a Hindu family persecuted in Bangladesh, was deemed blasphemous and banned in 1993. Nasreen was forced to flee the country in 1994 after receiving death threats.¹⁰
- **Turkey:** In December 2011, prosecutors filed a lawsuit against a man identified as “A.M.S.” for allegedly “ridiculing Muslim prayer rituals and the Islamic belief that the universe was created by God” on *Eksi Sozluk*, a “website on which contributors share their comments on various issues and incidents in Turkey.” A prison term of one-and-a-half years is sought by the prosecution.¹¹
- **Egypt:** In December 2011, Masoud Abdullah was accused of posting on Facebook allegedly insulting and blasphemous pictures of the Prophet Muhammad. Several individuals called for

Abdullah's prosecution and for Abdullah's family's banishment from their home.¹²

- **India:** On November 18, 2011, Syed Ali Shah Geelani, the leader of a separatist group from Kashmir, called for protests against “objectionable anti-Islamic” content posted on Facebook. The content in question was about the Kaaba, the most sacred site in Islam, and the Prophet Muhammad. Clashes erupted in several areas between groups of protestors—many of them youths and security forces—demanding a ban of Facebook. A few days later, additional protests occurred. Thirty-seven protestors were arrested and spent five days in jail after they threw stones at the police, burnt a bus, and broke shop windows. Twelve were injured in Udaipur, Rajasthan, in western India.¹³
- **Pakistan:** On October 13, 2011, Ameer Ali Wahocho, a retired schoolteacher, was sentenced to three years in prison for allegedly insulting members of the Prophet Muhammad's family. Wahocho was originally charged with blasphemy two years ago and received a one-month jail sentence, which he appealed. While out on bail, Wahocho's accuser filed a petition to review the judgment on the grounds that the sentence was too lenient, and the petition was granted.¹⁴
- **Egypt:** In October 2011, Aymnan Yusef Manseur was sentenced to three years hard labor for making allegedly blasphemous comments on Facebook.¹⁵
- **Pakistan:** On September 24, 2011, Faryal Tauseef Bhatti, a Christian eighth grade student, was expelled from school after she unintentionally misspelt a word which means “curse” on an Urdu exam about a poem praising the Prophet Muhammad. The teenager now faces blasphemy charges, and her family has had to move to an unknown location for their safety. Some prominent Muslim scholars and activists have opposed Faryal's expulsion, while many religious leaders and students have applauded the decision and held protest rallies demanding that a criminal case be registered.¹⁶
- **Kuwait:** On September 24, 2011, Mubarak al-Bathali, a Sunni Islamist, was sentenced to three years in jail for posting Twitter comments deemed derogatory to Shia Muslims.¹⁷ On November 28, the Court of Appeals overturned the verdict and ordered a reduction of the jail sentence to one week.¹⁸
- **Pakistan:** In September 2011, Muhammad Akram was arrested and charged with blasphemy under Section 295-B of Pakistan's Penal Code for burning a copy of the Koran during a ritual ceremony. A “self-styled magician,” Akram had been hired by a merchant to conduct black magic against a business rival.¹⁹ The merchant, who claimed to be unaware that the ritual would include burning the Koran, notified the police.
- **Pakistan:** In September 2011, police arrested Rizwan, a 35-year-old Muslim man from Faisalabad, after a neighbor reported him to the police for burning pages from the Koran. He was charged and sent to jail for fourteen days. Rizwan claims that he had found the pages on the ground and burned them to “maintain the dignity of the holy book” in accordance with Islamic law. A threatening crowd gathered outside of his home calling for punishment, some throwing stones and threatening to burn his house down.²⁰
- **Bangladesh:** In August 2011, a coalition of pro-Sharia Islamic parties threatened the Bangladesh government with a country-wide strike if Madan Mohan Das, an assistant headmaster at a government high school, was not arrested and charged with making blasphemous comments about the Prophet Muhammad. Hundreds of teachers, students and parents protested against Das who was suspended from his job.

This was the second Hindu teacher in two weeks to be suspended for allegedly making blasphemous remarks.²¹

- **Bangladesh:** Shankar Biswas, a Hindu teacher at a government high school in Tungipara, was fired on July 18, 2011, after allegedly making blasphemous remarks against the Prophet Muhammad in class. Islamic groups around the country and thousands of students and their parents staged protests while some demonstrators attacked his house. Biswas was forced to flee.²²
- **Pakistan:** On June 22, 2011, 29-year-old Abdul Sattar was sentenced to death and fined 50,000 Pakistani rupees (approximately 1,000 USD) in Talagang for committing blasphemy. Sattar confessed to sending derogatory text messages and making calls in which the Koran, the Prophet Muhammad, and companions of the Prophet were blasphemed.²³
- **Egypt:** Images of Mickey Mouse with a beard and Minnie Mouse fully covered with a veil prompted outrage in June 2011. Posted on the Twitter account of Naguib Sawiris—an influential Christian Copt telecommunications mogul who has been politically active in post-revolutionary Egypt—the image was allegedly intended to be humorous. However, fifteen lawyers filed a lawsuit against Sawiris, charging him with blasphemy for insulting Islam. Islamic clerics have denounced Sawiris’s actions, and tens of thousands have joined Facebook groups that call for boycott on products made by his companies.²⁴ The Court rejected the complaint in March 2012 on the grounds that the plaintiff had no legal standing.²⁵
- **India:** In May 2011, The Indian Ministry of Communications and Information Technology issued regulations that require operators of social media networks, including Facebook and Google, to screen content and remove any offensive, including blasphemous, material within 36 hours of receiving a complaint.²⁶
- **Pakistan:** In response to the “2nd Annual Draw Muhammad Day” hosted by the social networking website Facebook on May 20, 2011, a public interest litigation firm, Muhammad and Ahmad, petitioned to impose a permanent ban on access to Facebook. The firm alleged that Islamic values were being derogated in the name of information, which was hurting the feelings of “billions of Muslims” and that the Ministry had failed to block websites spreading religious hatred. The petitioners have requested that the government establish a permanent legal authority to monitor objectionable activities around the world and for Facebook and other websites in Pakistan that display blasphemous material against the Prophet Muhammad or any religion is permanently banned. At a hearing in September, the Lahore High Court directed the Ministry of Information Technology to submit a report about the petition and directed the ministry “to block access to all websites in Pakistan spreading religious hatred on the Internet.”²⁷
- **Pakistan:** On April 27, 2011, 27-year-old Saiful Malook was arrested in Kotli Bala, Hangu, for burning a copy of the Koran. Malook claims that he picked up damaged pages of the Koran from a mosque and burned them at a shrine to save them from desecration in accordance with Islamic law. Before the police arrived, he was shot in the leg by an enraged bystander.²⁸
- **Jordan:** On April 25, 2011, the trial of Danish cartoonist Kurt Westergaard and 19 other Danish journalists and newspaper editors began *in absentia* in Amman. Charges against Westergaard were filed after he published satirical drawings of the Prophet Muhammad in 2005. The plaintiffs call themselves

“God’s Prophet Unites Us”—a coalition of Jordanian academics, lawmakers, journalists, and politicians. The charges include “blasphemy against the Prophet and humiliation of Islam and Muslim.” If convicted, Westergaard could be sentenced to 10 years in prison. This would require Westergaard to be deported to Jordan.²⁹

- **Egypt:** On April 12, 2011, Karam Saber, the author of *Ayn Allah* (“Where is God”), was accused by a group of lawyers of insulting religious beliefs by including offensive phrases in his book. The book has been sent to a committee of scholars at Al-Alzhar University, a Sunni institute, to determine the validity of the claims.³⁰ This case incited fears of a revival of cases based on the *hisbah* doctrine, according to which Muslims have the right to file lawsuits when an exalted right of God has been violated, even if they are not directly harmed.³¹
- **Pakistan:** Irfan Rafique is accused of sending a text message which allegedly contained derogatory language about the Prophet Muhammad. Rafique has been imprisoned since March 30, 2011, charged with blasphemy under Section 295-C of Pakistan’s Penal Code, which carries a sentence of death or life imprisonment. The accused pleaded insanity and applied to have the charges dropped. The complainant challenged Rafique’s right to be defended by counsel, claiming that the law provides that an insane person can only be represented by a relative. On May 18, Rafique’s lawyer was attacked at the court house by a group of protestors chanting slogans and holding banners with messages condemning blasphemy and declaring that defending a blasphemer is not permitted in Islam. The attorney was told to withdraw his representation of the accused and succumbed to the pressure, leaving Rafique without legal counsel.³²
- **Pakistan:** On March 4, 2011, Muhammad Imran was killed by 3 masked gunmen. This was just two weeks after he was released from jail when the blasphemy charges lodged against him were dropped due to lack of evidence. Though he was accused of defaming the Prophet Muhammad in a café in 2009, exactly what he said is unknown because repeating the words would constitute an act of blasphemy.³³
- **Pakistan:** On March 2, 2011, Minister for Minority Affairs Shahbaz Bhatti was assassinated by three men at his residence as a result of his opposition to Pakistan’s blasphemy laws. At the murder scene, leaflets were found threatening opponents of the blasphemy law with a similar fate. Shahbaz Bhatti knew that his opposition to Pakistan’s blasphemy laws put his life at risk, but he remained unwilling to compromise his conscience or his principles in the face of that danger.³⁴ Minister Bhatti was the first Christian Parliamentarian to become Minister of Minority Affairs and was one of the founding members of the All Pakistan Minorities Alliance. He encouraged minority groups to fight for their rights without resorting to violence. In July 2009, he expressed his solidarity with the victims of mob violence in Gogra, Punjab, by joining their peaceful protests and later sought a pardon for Aasia Bibi, a farm worker sentenced to death on false charges of blasphemy. Members of the Tehrik-e-Taliban have taken responsibility for the assassination, but no one has been charged as of yet.³⁵
- **Austria:** On February 15, 2011, Elizabeth Sabaditsch-Wolff was convicted under Section 283 of the Austrian Penal Code for “denigrating the teachings of a legally recognized religion” and fined 480 Euros. Sabaditsch-Wolff was initially charged with incitement to hatred as a result of a series of lectures she gave in Vienna on Islam where she criticized the treatment of women and the practice of jihad in the

Middle East. She was acquitted of the charge of incitement. The Court's ruling focused on a comment she made that the Prophet Muhammad would be considered a "pedophile" today, based on his marriage to Aisha bint Abu Bakr when she was 6 years old. This statement was found to be "unreasonable" and constituted an illegal denigration of Muhammad. Sabaditsch-Wolff is appealing the decision.³⁶ On December 20, her conviction was upheld by the higher court. If she refuses to pay the fine, she could spend as much as two months in prison.³⁷

- **Pakistan:** On January 29, 2011, Sami Ullah (also known as Muhammad Samiullah), a seventeen-year-old first year pre-engineering student at a private college in Karachi, was accused of writing insulting comments about Muhammad on the answer sheets of an exam taken in April 2010. A complaint was lodged against him by the Board of Intermediate Education, and Sami Ullah was arrested on charges of blasphemy under Section 295-C of Pakistan's Penal Code which carries a penalty of death.³⁸ Police Officer Qudrat Shal Lodhi declined to say what Ullah had written on his exam for fear of violating the blasphemy laws himself. The accused has offered an apology. Though Sami Ullah's family has visited him in jail, they have not felt safe staying in their home of ten years since the day after their son's arrest. Sami Ullah's case was remanded to February 17 but was postponed due to procedural errors. The trial was rescheduled to begin on March 29, 2011, but it is unknown whether the trial has commenced.
- **Pakistan:** On January 4, 2011, Salmaan Taseer, the Governor of Punjab, was assassinated by his bodyguard as a result of his efforts to prevent the misuse of the country's blasphemy laws. Governor Taseer offered to seek a presidential pardon for Aasia Bibi, the Christian farm worker and mother of five

who was convicted of blasphemy and sentenced to death in November 2010. Mumtaz Hussein Qadri, who was charged with murder in an antiterrorism court in February, openly admits to assassinating Governor Taseer. Qadri sought to justify his actions in a 40-page written statement submitted to the court in which he provided verses from the Koran and Islamic jurisprudence about blasphemy.³⁹ On October 1, 2011, Qadri was sentenced to death. His lawyer has appealed the death sentence on the grounds that the defendant should have been tried for murder in the Federal Shariat Court (FSC) of Pakistan instead of the Riwalpindi Anti-Terrorism Court.⁴⁰

- **Palestinian Authority:** On October 31, 2010, Waleed Hasayin, a 20-year-old Palestinian blogger, was arrested in Qalqilyah, West Bank, for posting comments alleged to be blasphemous on his blog and Facebook page. Using the name Waleed al-Husseini, he described himself as "an atheist from Jerusalem-Palestine" and wrote that God is "a primitive Bedouin and anthropomorphic" and that "people are free to think and believe in whatever suits them."⁴¹ Currently detained at the local intelligence headquarters, Hasayin, who has been denied access to a lawyer, faces a potential life sentence. If tried, a 1960 Jordanian law against defaming religion would be applied.⁴²
- **Iran:** In September 2010, the Iranian-Canadian blogger Hossein Derakhshan, founder of one of the first Farsi-language blogs, was sentenced to more than 19 years in prison. Derakhshan was convicted of "insulting Islamic thought and religious figures" and a number of other charges, including "spreading propaganda against the ruling establishment" and "promotion of counterrevolutionary groups."⁴³ Derakhshan's conviction was upheld by an appeals court in June 2011.⁴⁴

- **Pakistan:** On July 20, 2010, 60-year-old Zaibun Nisa was released from a prison mental ward where she spent 14 years without being tried in a court of law. Nisa, who is mentally ill, was accused by a cleric of throwing torn pages from the Koran down a drain in 1996, although no evidence linked her to the incident.⁴⁵
- **Pakistan:** On July 19, 2010, Rashid Emmanuel and Sajid Emmanuel were shot to death in the city of Faisalabad as they emerged from a courthouse where they were standing trial on accusations of blasphemy. The two brothers, residents of the predominantly Christian Waris Pura neighborhood of Faisalabad, were accused by a local trader of distributing pamphlets containing disrespectful remarks about the Prophet Muhammad, bearing their full names, signatures, and addresses. The accused had successfully argued that they had been framed and were waiting to be cleared of all charges at the time of their murder. The alleged case of blasphemy had led protesters to march through the town calling for the death of the brothers and to pelt a local Catholic church with rocks.⁴⁶ Maqsood Ahmed was found guilty of murder and sentenced to death by an Anti-Terrorism Court on April 18, 2011. He was also fined \$47,784. The verdict has sparked outrage from activists who have vowed to appeal the decision.⁴⁷ The regional police admitted that the murders occurred due to the “negligence” and “inefficiency” of police officers.
- **India:** On July 4, 2010, Professor T.J. Joseph was attacked with an axe on his way home from church in Kerala, severing his right hand. The professor had been suspended from Newman’s College after he was accused of blasphemy for distributing an exam questionnaire to undergraduate students with an allegedly derogatory reference to the Prophet Muhammad. A criminal case has been filed against Joseph and is pending trial.⁴⁸ On June 13, 2011, Naushad was arrested for attacking Professor Joseph and turned over to the National Investigation Agency.⁴⁹
- **India:** On June 9, 2010, four ministers in the Mayawati government, who serve on the editorial board of *Ambedkar Today*, and five others, including the editor and publisher of the journal, were charged with injuring the religious sentiments of Hindus.⁵⁰ The accused had allegedly published a blasphemous article condemning various Hindu rituals.
- **Pakistan:** On May 19, 2010, the Lahore High Court of Pakistan imposed an indefinite nationwide ban on the social networking website Facebook in response to the “Everybody Draw Muhammad Day” event publicized on its webpage. The individuals responsible for creating the page, a group of mostly Western cartoonists and free speech activists, stated their purpose as taking a stance against Islamic extremists who had issued death threats to the creators of Comedy Central’s *South Park* cartoon that depicted the Prophet Muhammad. Protestors marching across Pakistan burned flags and called for holy war, while the Islamic Lawyer’s Forum successfully lodged a request to have the “blasphemous” and “objectionable” material banned.⁵¹ Access to Facebook was restored on May 31st following the site’s removal of the group’s page and its alleged apology to Pakistani authorities.⁵²
- **Pakistan:** In May 2010, authorities filed an application for a “First Information Report,” as a first step towards initiating a criminal investigation for committing blasphemy under Section 295-C of the Pakistani Penal Code⁵³, against Mark Zuckerberg, the founder of the social networking website Facebook. This provision of the Penal Code carries a punishment of death or life imprisonment for derogatory remarks, “either spoken or written or by visible representation ... that defiles the sacred name of the Holy

Prophet Muhammad.” The investigation stems from a “Draw Muhammad” contest which was launched on Facebook following the “Everybody Draw Muhammad Day” event, also publicized on its webpage. Two of Facebook’s cofounders and the German woman who initiated the contest, are also under investigation. In June, Pakistani authorities banned seventeen websites and scrutinized seven others for content considered “blasphemous” or “offensive” to Muslims. The government of Bangladesh also blocked Facebook and requested that local Internet service providers block caricatures that offend religious sympathies.⁵⁴

- **Indonesia:** In May 2010, Abraham Felix, a 16-year-old high school student, was charged under Article 156 of the Criminal Code for religious defamation. The Bogor Police arrested Abraham for creating a blog that showed him stomping on the Koran and putting the holy book in the toilet. The Catholic school which was depicted in the blog was attacked by an angry mob. In September 2010, Felix was sentenced by the Bekasi District Court to one year in prison.⁵⁵
- **Poland:** In May 2010, Dorota Rabczewska, a member of the Polish musical group MENSA, was charged with insulting religious sentiments after suggesting that the Bible was written by “people who drank too much wine and smoked herbal cigarettes” during a television interview.⁵⁶ On January 17, 2012, Rabczewska was fined 5,000 zloty (\$1,450). Under Poland’s blasphemy law, Rabczewska could have served a sentence of two years in prison in addition to the fine.⁵⁷
- **Saudi Arabia:** In March 2010, complaints were filed against a Saudi writer who allegedly described a Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad as barbaric during a program on *Al Hurra*. The plaintiffs seek the court to administer punishment in

accordance with Sharia law, claiming the writer’s words offend mainstream Islam.⁵⁸

- **Sri Lanka:** On March 20, 2010, Sarah Malanie Perera, an expatriate and the author of two books describing her conversion from Buddhism to Islam, was arrested while visiting Sri Lanka on holiday. Her books were alleged to be “offensive to the spiritual leader of Buddhism.” Perera was apprehended at a courier’s office while she was shipping copies of her books to Bahrain, where she currently resides. On April 20, 2010, after two months in jail, Perera was released on bail. In May 2011, facing a sentence of up to three years, charges were finally dropped and she was allowed to return home to Bahrain.⁵⁹
- **Malaysia:** In March 2010, Sisters in Islam (SIS), an organization that seeks to advance the rights of Muslim women, issued a statement to challenge the caning of three women. Sisters in Islam consider caning, which is permissible under the Sharia law in Malaysia, to be unconstitutional, inhumane and unjust. Following the statement, as many as fifty police reports were filed against SIS by the Selangor Islamic Religious Council (Mais) and others. The Malaysian Assembly of Mosque Youth applied to the High Court to prevent SIS from using the word “Islam” on their website and in SIS publications based on the claim that it infers that SIS speaks on behalf of all Muslims. Police reports were also filed against *The Star* newspaper by Mais for denigrating Islam and violating Sharia law when it published an article questioning the wisdom of caning. *The Star* withdrew the article and issued an apology.⁶⁰
- **Jordan:** Eslam Samham, a 27-year-old poet, was arrested on October 19, 2009, on charges of apostasy and insulting Islam in his collection of poems entitled *Light as a Shadow*. He was found guilty of slandering Islam and “insulting religious sentiment,” sentenced to one

year in prison and fined 10,000 dinars (approximately \$14,000 USD). He is currently appealing his conviction. Samham fears the consequences of the charges brought against him—even if he is acquitted. He said, “If I lose, it will destroy my professional life and life in general. My children’s future will be lost and my own future will be lost.”⁶¹

- **Iran:** On June 9, 2009, Mohsen Namjoo, a renowned singer and composer, was sentenced in absentia to a five-year jail term for “insulting sanctities, ridiculing the Koran and dishonoring the holy book of the Muslims” in a song. Namjoo, who resides in Vienna, Austria, claims that he was the victim of the “unauthorized release” of his work on the Internet.⁶² In February 2011, Malaysia barred Namjoo from performing in Kuala Lumpur due to his conviction.⁶³
- **Egypt:** In April 2009, Cairo’s Administrative Court revoked the license of *Ibdaa*, a small literary magazine, for publishing a poem by Helmy Salem entitled “Laila Mourad’s Balcony.”⁶⁴ The Court held that the poem “flagrantly offended the divine being in a way that suggests the utmost debasement” because it depicted God in the images of people, objects and animals. Salem was accused of blasphemy and subsequently the award of excellence that he had received from the Ministry of Culture was revoked.⁶⁵
- **Afghanistan:** On January 29, 2009, the Supreme Court recommended that two journalists, *Aftab*’s Chief Editor Merhossin Mahdaw and Ali Raza Payam, be put to death for publishing a blasphemous cartoon. The cartoon portrayed a monkey evolving into a man slumped over a computer with the words, “Government plus religion equals cruelty.” The journalists were ultimately released and are believed to have fled the country.⁶⁶
- **Iran:** In December 2008, the Iranian blogger and journalist Omid Reza Mirsyafi was sentenced to two and a half years in prison for insulting religious leaders. Mirsyafi claimed that his blog was “completely private and was read only by a few of his friends.” On March 18, 2009, Mirsyafi died in Tehran’s Evin Prison. His family is contesting claims from the authorities that the death was the result of suicide.⁶⁷
- **Egypt:** On October 27, 2008, Reda Abdel-Rahman, a 32-year-old social worker and blogger, was accused of “contempt for the Muslim faith” and arrested.⁶⁸ Abdel-Rahman was using his blog *Justice, Freedom and Peace* to promote the ideas of the Koranists, who believe that the Koran is the only sacred text in Islam. According to the Egyptian Initiative for Human Rights, Abdel-Rahman was forced to sign a statement in which he promised “to stop publishing any articles on the Internet or any religious writing.” Abdel-Rahman claims that he was severely beaten and humiliated during his detention. He was released on January 23, 2009.
- **Malaysia:** In September 2008, Raja Petra Kamarudin, a prominent blogger and the founder of the online newspaper *Malaysia Today*, was arrested under Section 73(1) of the Internal Security Act, an emergency act which enables indefinite detention without trial. Kamarudin was accused of publishing articles that “tarnished the image of Islam” and defamed the Prophet Muhammad. The *Malaysia Today* website was blocked for three weeks, Kamarudin was detained in an unknown location before his release through a writ of habeas corpus.⁶⁹
- **Sudan:** On November 27, 2007, Gillian Gibbons, a 54-year-old primary school teacher from England, was arrested for committing blasphemy after her class of seven-year-old students named their classroom teddy bear Muhammad. An angry crowd gathered outside the police station where Gillian Gibbons was held

for a week before being offered a full pardon by Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir. If the teacher had been found guilty, she faced a public lashing or up to six months in prison⁷⁰.

- **Iran:** In May, 2007, eight student editors and activists at Amir Kabir University in Tehran were arrested for defaming Islam in student publications. The articles allegedly questioned the fallibility of humans, including the Prophet Muhammad. Of the eight, three were found guilty and imprisoned: the managing editor of *Sahar*, Ahmad Ghasaban was arrested on May 3; the editor-in-chief of *Khat-e Sefer*, Majid Tavakkoli, was summoned to a Revolutionary Court on May 8; and the secretary of political affairs of the Islamic Student Association, Ehsan Mansouri, was arrested on May 8. On April 5, 2008, the students—who denied any involvement in the publication—were sentenced to prison terms of 22 to 30 months. On August 13, 2008, all of them were released after 80 days in jail. The students’ families issued an “open letter” in which they asserted that their sons were tortured and coerced into making false confessions.⁷¹
- **Egypt:** On February 22, 2007, Abdul Kareem Nabeel Suliman (a.k.a. Kareem Amer), a 22-year-old law student from Alexandria, was sentenced to four years in prison: three years for contempt of religion and one year for defaming President Mubarak. Disturbed by what Kareem perceived to be religious extremism at his university, he expressed secular views promoting gender equality and questioning Islam on his blog and websites, *Modern Discussion* and *Copts United*. Kareem was first arrested in 2005 and detained for 12 days. In November 2006, he was arrested again after being expelled from Al-Azhar University, who had informed state prosecutors of his writings. Until his trial, he was held in solitary confinement because he refused

to recant. In March 2007, the Court of Appeals upheld Kareem’s conviction and approved a civil claim brought by Egyptian lawyers who sought to fine him for “insulting Islam.”⁷² Kareem’s family has disowned him and his father has called for the application of Sharia law against him. Kareem was awarded the 2007 Hugo Young Award for Journalism and is an honorary member of English PEN. He was released on November 17, 2010, eleven days passed his official release date and after one final beating by Egyptian security forces.⁷³

- **Afghanistan:** In January 2007, Sayed Perwiz Kambakhsh, a 23-year-old university student and journalist for *Johan-e Naw*, was sentenced to death for downloading and distributing online materials that questioned polygamy and the treatment of women in Islam. Kambakhsh, who claims that he was unfairly accused and mistreated, was tried without a defense attorney present and was not permitted to testify on his own behalf. A three-judge panel later overturned the death sentence and instead sentenced Kambakhsh to 20 years in prison. In September 2009, after serving two years of his term, he was secretly pardoned and fled the country.⁷⁴
- **Jordan:** In 2006, two Jordanian magazine editors, Jihad Momani and Hisham Khalidi, were sentenced to two months in prison for “denigrating the Prophet in public and insulting God” after reprinting three of the controversial Danish cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad, together with an article questioning the response to the cartoons. Copies of the publication were withdrawn from news stands and Momani, who was fired, offered a public letter of apology.⁷⁵

II. Outbreaks of Mob Violence as a Direct Consequence of Blasphemy Laws

The disturbing incidents described below provide a window into the violence that

blasphemy or rumors of blasphemy, perhaps a misspoken word or the alleged desecration of the Koran, can spawn. It has become commonplace for mobs to gather in and outside the courtrooms where blasphemy cases are tried, asserting that they are prepared to take the law into their own hands if the court does not hand down a guilty verdict. Violence does not end at the courthouse doors. Mobs have descended on towns, burning places of worship, looting homes and killing or injuring residents. In the cases described below, governments have largely failed in their obligations to protect people—both alleged violators of blasphemy laws as well as judges and lawyers involved in those cases—from extrajudicial mob violence. In fact, in some instances the authorities have been complicit. In some cases, the perpetrators have asserted it to be their “religious duty” to kill blasphemers and their supporters, which include friends, family, judges, and lawyers. Although no one has actually been executed under the blasphemy laws in Pakistan, thirty individuals accused of committing blasphemy have been killed extra judicially since the 1980s.⁷⁶ The perpetrators of such extrajudicial violence are rarely brought to justice.

■ **Tunisia:** On October 14, 2011, about 100 extremists attacked the home of Nabil Karoui, the owner of the television station Nessma that aired *Persepolis*, an animated film about the 1979 Iranian revolution in which God is depicted as a bearded old man. The attackers—who arrived in taxis armed with knives and Molotov cocktails—believe that the film violates Islamic values forbidding the depiction of God. Twenty protestors forced their way into Karoui’s home, breaking windows, tearing out gas pipes, and injuring a housemaid. Five alleged attackers were arrested. Protests took place in other parts of the city as well. Though peaceful at first, demonstrations turned violent when as many as 1,000 individuals approached government offices, attempting to break into the

offices of the Prime Minister in the Kasbah area of Tunis. The police responded with tear gas. On January 24, 2012, a group of Salafists verbally abused and physically attacked protestors rallying in support of Karoui outside the court house where he was being tried. The trial has been adjourned until April 19. If convicted, he faces a prison sentence of three to five years.⁷⁷ In June 2011, six protestors were arrested after they broke down the glass doors of a movie theater screening *Neither Allah nor Master*, a film about secularism in Tunisia.⁷⁸

- **Indonesia:** On August 14, 2011, in response to the sentencing of individuals involved in a fatal attack on an Ahmadiyya house of worship in February 2011, hundreds of members of Islamic Defender’s Front (FPI), armed with machetes and bamboo sticks, stormed another Ahmadi mosque while ten Ahmadis were praying inside in Makassar, South Sulawesi. One victim suffered serious head injuries and three human rights workers who tried to stop the attack were beaten. According to reports, the police did nothing to stop the violent attack.⁷⁹
- **Bangladesh:** On July 19, 2011, Shankar Biswas, a 32-year-old high school English teacher, was fired after allegedly making blasphemous remarks about the Prophet Muhammad. A senior police officer told reporters that “students and their parents staged instant protests and then some 5,000 people demonstrated the next day, demanding action.” Some protestors attacked Biswas’s house, forcing him to flee.⁸⁰
- **Pakistan:** On June 10, 2011, a mob of more than 500 demonstrators shouting “Death to the blasphemer” and “Christians must pay for ridiculing Islam” descended on the home of Dildar Masih after he was accused of blaspheming Islam. Charges against Masih, a 26-year-old Christian, stemmed from an incident

in which he reprimanded a group of Muslim boys from a nearby religious school who attacked his 8-year-old nephew when he refused to embrace Islam and proclaim Muhammad as a prophet. Masih's father—who tried to calm the mob by apologizing on behalf of his son—was told, “if they start forgiving everyone for blasphemy, then it would become routine for all to ridicule Islam.” Clerics encouraged all Muslims to “come out for the defense of Islam.” The armed mob went to Masih's workplace and beat him. The police were called and escorted Masih to the station where he was charged under Section 298 of Pakistan's Penal Code. As many as 2,000 Muslims followed the convoy, blocking the main road and demanding that Masih be handed over to them. To protect the detainee, the police used a decoy vehicle to pretend that the prisoner was inside and being transferred to another city. The next day, clerics continued to urge revenge against Masih, forcing his father and ten other families to flee.⁸¹

- **Pakistan:** On May 2, 2011, Babar Masih, a 25-year-old mentally ill Christian from Sahiwal, was charged under Section 298 of Pakistan's Penal Code for uttering words “with deliberate intent to wound religious feelings” and Section 298-A for “use of derogatory remarks ... in respect of holy personages.” Masih suffers from a psychiatric disorder typified by fits of rage. Faced with an angry mob led by local clerics eager to take justice into their own hands, Masih's family handed him over to the police to be placed in protective custody. The mob chased the police van carrying the accused while his family fled for their lives. Neighbors claim that they were forced by clerics to tell the police that Masih was using abusive language—and that they could not refuse to give evidence. On August 2, Babar Masih was granted bail and discreetly released to avoid public attention.⁸²

- **Pakistan:** On April 30, 2011, Mushtaq Gill Masih, an instructor at the Christian Technical Training Center, and his son Farrukh were taken into protective custody after being accused of desecrating a copy of the Koran in Gujranwala, Punjab. Following a police investigation, it was determined that the charges were fabricated and the two men were released and relocated with their families to an unspecified location for safety. Their release together with claims that the Koran had been burned sparked a riot led by clerics who announced the news over mosque loudspeakers. Hundreds of protestors gathered, armed with clubs and batons, and threw rocks at a church, government offices, and the police station as well as the homes of Christians. Eighteen persons were injured, including three police officers. One hundred fifty protestors were arrested.⁸³ Three thousand families fled Azizabad Colony, fearful that this incident could lead to the kind of violence experienced in Gojra where 8 Christians were killed in 2010. Muslims living in this community were also fearful and placed their religious affiliation on their doors to avoid being targeted. Police arrested as many as one hundred rioters. The head of the Gujranwala police force warned rioters that harassing and targeting Christians would not be tolerated and that “strict action” would be taken against the provocateurs of the riot.⁸⁴
- **Ethiopia:** On March 2, 2011, a violent mob assaulted Christians and ravaged their property in the Oromia region of West Ethiopia. At least one Christian was killed, and a college and dozens of churches and homes were burned.⁸⁵ The violence began after Christians in the area were accused of tearing a copy of the Koran and using the pages as toilet paper. Calls for retribution were announced over the loudspeakers of local mosques and the violence then spread from Asendabo to other towns nearby.

The perpetrators are believed to be members of the extremist Kowarja sect.⁸⁶

- **Indonesia:** On February 8, 2011, more than one thousand protestors stormed the District Court in Temanggung after Antonius Richmond Bawengen, a Christian from Jakarta, received what extremists believed to be a too lenient sentence for blasphemy.⁸⁷ The mob attacked prosecutors, judges, and the defendant, injuring nine people; then destroyed three churches and torched vehicles. Bawengen was sentenced to five years in prison, the maximum sentence under Article 156 of Indonesia's criminal code, for distributing books and leaflets that "spread hatred about Islam." Some called for the death penalty.⁸⁸ Prosecutors are seeking a one-year sentence for Syiabuddin, the leader of the mob, because he runs an Islamic boarding school and has had no prior convictions. Seventeen of the 25 men who were tried for participating in the riot also received light jail sentences of four to five months on charges of vandalism. The maximum sentence for the charge of incitement is six years in prison.⁸⁹
- **Indonesia:** On February 6, 2011, while twenty-one members of the Ahmadiyya sect assembled at the home of their leader, a mob composed of more than one thousand villagers armed with machetes and sticks, stormed the house of worship, killing four and wounding six others. Graphic video footage of the brutal and allegedly unprovoked attack shows the attackers stoning their victims to death and then beating the corpses, some naked, as police officers and villagers watched and did nothing to stop the bloodshed. According to Waseem Sayed, a spokesperson for the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in the United States, the police were warned of the attack days before the event.⁹⁰
- **Indonesia:** On December 15, 2010, Gregory Lloyd Luke, a 64-year-old American who runs a guest house, was sentenced to five months in prison after being convicted of two counts of blasphemy by the Praya District Court in Lombok. Luke pulled the plug of a sound system in a mosque near his home during a prayer reading. Angry residents ransacked his home.⁹¹ Despite the police presence and a video documenting the attack, only 12 villagers were charged and received sentences ranging from three to six months imprisonment for their role in the attack. None were charged with murder, even though one alleged perpetrator had been caught on video bashing an Ahmadi man to death with a rock. The court handed down lighter sentences than what prosecutors had recommended, stating that the Ahmadi were the true culprits instigating the violence. The same court found an Ahmadi victim of that attack, Deden Sudjana, guilty of disobeying police orders and "ill-treatment," and sentenced him to six months in prison. Sudjana's hand was nearly severed during the attack.⁹²
- **Indonesia:** In September 2010, when German national Stephen Alexander found a statue at his villa had been decapitated, he demanded that the village chief locate the vandal within two weeks. The villagers were insulted when Alexander asked what kind of Muslims they were, and then accused him of blaspheming Islam. Hundreds of residents of Lombok Island attacked his villa and burned his motorcycle. Alexander was arrested by the police and held in protective custody.⁹³
- **Pakistan:** On July 5, 2010, more than a thousand Muslims blocked the road leading to the home of three Christians, demanding that a blasphemy case be registered against a family in Lahore. The family, who are illiterate, allegedly used a plastic sheet that contained Koranic verses inscribed on it to serve as a roof over an open bathroom. Yousaf Masih,

Bashiran Bibi, and Zahid Masih were charged with blasphemy under Section 295-B of Pakistan's Penal Code which provides that "Whoever willfully defiles or damages or desecrates a copy of the Holy Koran or an extract therefrom or uses it in any derogatory manner or for any unlawful purpose shall be punishable with imprisonment for life." According to members of a fact finding team sent to the site, workers did not find any Koranic text inscribed on the divisive plastic sheet.⁹⁴ Unable to safely stay in their home while awaiting trial, the family has been forced into hiding.

- **Pakistan:** On February 25, 2010, Qamar David, a Christian, was sentenced to twenty-five years in prison and fined 100,000 rupees (approximately \$1,150 USD) for sending blasphemous text messages in 2006. He was convicted under Section 295-A of the Penal Code for "injuring religious feelings" and under Section 295-C, for making derogatory remarks against the Prophet Muhammad.⁹⁵ The trial of Qamar David stirred up local extremists who threatened to take the law into their own hands. David's attorney, Parves Aslam Choudry, a lawyer with Legal Aid for Destitute and Settlement (LADS) in Lahore, received multiple threats, including that his home and office would be "blown up." A mob outside the Court House waited to hear the verdict, declaring that they would "perform their religious duty to kill blasphemers and supporters."⁹⁶ Choudry received similar threats when representing other individuals accused of blasphemy. In March 2011, David died in prison where he had been held since the summer of 2006. Officials say the cause of death was a heart attack but in light of reports of prison abuse, human rights groups and David's lawyer and family have called for an investigation.⁹⁷
- **Malaysia:** In January 2010, violence erupted in the suburb of Desa Melawati after Malaysia's high court ruled in a

landmark decision that *The Herald*, a Catholic publication that had been prohibited from using the word "Allah" since 1997, has the right to use the word "Allah" in reference to God and that the term "Allah" is not exclusive to Muslims. Masked men on motorcycles firebombed three churches while others demonstrated against the ruling peacefully. Government lawyers argued that "'Allah' denotes the Muslim God ... and is exclusively for Muslims." Lawyers for the *Herald* argued that "'Allah' is an Arabic word for 'God,'" predating Islam. Following the protests, the judge granted a stay and the government appealed to overturn the court's ruling.⁹⁸

- **Pakistan:** On the evening of July 30, 2009, a mob of hundreds descended on the village of Korian in response to an unfounded rumor that local Christians had desecrated a copy of the Koran at a wedding party days before. Christian residents fled, while the enraged mob looted and burned as many as 47 homes. At year's end, the "police had arrested 54 individuals, of whom 43 were released on bail and 11 remained in jail."⁹⁹ The violence did not end in Korian. On August 1, 2009, a local *Ulema* (legal scholar) led an angry mob of thousands to nearby Gojra, some armed and masked. Twenty people were injured and seven people died, including five members of the Hameed family who burned to death when their home was set on fire.¹⁰⁰ Among the dead were two children aged 6 and 13. In addition, two churches lay in ruins and more than 100 Christian homes were torched and looted.¹⁰¹ The police did little to deter the mob. Investigation into the violence determined that the accusations of blasphemy were unfounded and that banned Sunni extremist groups in the area had incited the attacks. Gojra's Christians refused to bury the dead immediately and instead "used coffins containing the burned bodies to block the town's railway track

until police filed a report against the local residents and officials involved in the attack.¹⁰² Shahbaz Bhatti, the late Minister for Minority Affairs who was assassinated on March 2, 2011 because of his campaign to reform the country's blasphemy laws, vehemently condemned the violence and joined the victims at the site of their protest.¹⁰³ A unanimous condemnation of the violence was issued by Pakistan's Parliament. The government pledged \$2.5 million towards rebuilding the lives of Christian families in Gojra and August 11 has been declared "Minority Day." At the end of 2010, "police had arrested 42 individuals in connection with the Gojra incident of whom 34 were released on bail and 8 remained in custody at Toba Tek Singh."¹⁰⁴ On June 7, 2011, despite written statements from 185 witnesses, all suspects were acquitted in a special Anti-Terrorism Court in Faisalabad based on the absence of five witnesses who were allegedly not in Pakistan.¹⁰⁵

- **Pakistan:** On June 30, 2009, a mob consisting of an estimated six hundred Muslims launched an attack on local Christians in the village of Bahmani in the Kasur district of Punjab. The incident was triggered when Muhammad Riaz publicly accused Sardar Masih of making derogatory remarks against the Prophet Muhammad following a quarrel. A local clergyman used a loud speaker to urge villagers to band together against Sardar Masih. During the rampage, the angry crowd reportedly burned churches, destroyed homes, looted valuables and attacked fleeing civilians while police at the scene stood by in silence.¹⁰⁶
- **Indonesia:** In December 2008, a mob of as many as 300 people burned down two churches, a health clinic and 67 homes in the town of Masohi in Central Maluku Province. The violence was in response to accusations that Welhelmina Holle, a 49-year-old Christian primary school teacher, had allegedly made insulting

remarks about Islam to her sixth grade students. At least six people were injured during the riots.¹⁰⁷ Holle was subsequently charged with blasphemy under Article 156 of the Criminal Code and served a sentence of one year in prison. She was released on December 10, 2009.

- **Pakistan:** On October 10, 2008, Gulsher Masih and his 25 year old daughter, Sandal Gulsher, were detained in a Faisalabad prison following accusations that Gulsher Masih had encouraged his daughter to tear pages from the Koran. Charges were filed under Section 295-B of Pakistan's Penal Code.¹⁰⁸ Loudspeakers from a nearby mosque were used to broadcast the accusations, which led to an enraged mob of hundreds from Tehsil Chak Jhurma and neighboring villages to march through the streets calling for death to the Christian blasphemers. The home of the accused was stoned as was a nearby church. The police prevented the Gulshers' home from being set on fire and placed the family in protective custody. On December 14, 2009, after serving thirteen months and fourteen days in prison, the Gulshers were acquitted of the blasphemy charges due to contradictory statements by witnesses.¹⁰⁹
- **Afghanistan:** On September 11, 2008, Ahmed Ghaus Zalami, a journalist, and Mullah Qari Mushtag of the Tamin-e-Ansar Mosque were sentenced to twenty years in prison under Article 130¹¹⁰ of the Afghan Constitution for publishing a translation of the Koran without satisfying the requirement of providing accompanying Arabic verses for comparison. Following their arrest in October 2007, numerous demonstrations were held, including one in Jalalabad attended by more than one thousand university students, demanding the death penalty for Zalami and Mullah Qari Mushtag. Muhammad Ateef Noori, the publisher, was sentenced to five years in

prison. The three men received a presidential pardon on March 20, 2010.¹¹¹

- **Indonesia:** On June 9, 2008, the Home Minister, Minister of Religious Affairs, and Attorney General signed a joint decree (Number 199/2008) imposing criminal sanctions of up to five years in jail to prevent “the Ahmadiyah sect from spreading their religious practices and interpretations on the pretext that they deviate from the principal teachings of Islam.”¹¹² According to a spokesman for the Indonesian Attorney General, “Although the wording of the decree did not explicitly ban the group, it warned Ahmadiyya members that they were no longer free to practice their religion and strongly encouraged them to ‘return to mainstream Islam.’”¹¹³ Before the decree was signed, 500 Islamist militants attacked a peaceful gathering of opponents of the decree at Jakarta’s National Monument on June 1, injuring more than 60 people, “sending twelve of them to the hospital and ten militia members to court.”¹¹⁴ Victims included Muslim scholars, activists, and defenders of the Ahmadiyya. According to video footage, the police did little to halt the violent attacks though 50 members of the Islamic Defenders Front were arrested for taking part in the attacks on June 4.¹¹⁵ More violence erupted after the decree was signed. During the month of June, mobs descended on an Ahmadiyya mosque in Palembang, eight mosques in West Java, and two mosques in Cianjur. In addition, large crowds blocked Ahmadiis from meeting with district councils to express their views. Indonesia officially recognizes only six religions: Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Catholicism, Protestantism, and Confucianism.
- **Pakistan:** In May 2008, Dr. Robin Sardar, a Christian, was accused of blasphemy against the Prophet Muhammad and desecration of the Koran. A mob of hundreds threw stones at Dr. Sardar’s home and clinic while the local mosque

called for death to the “blasphemer.” The police intervened and detained him in Punjab’s Gujranwala Central Jail. Dr. Sardar’s wife and six children abandoned their home for fear of new attacks. On November 4, 2008, he was released after his accuser indicated there had been a misunderstanding.¹¹⁶ Local reports indicate that the incident arose out of a property dispute between the doctor and the son of the individual who accused him of blasphemy.

- **Nigeria:** In February 2008, a mob in the Nigerian state of Bauchi stormed a police station in which a woman accused of blasphemy against Islam was taking refuge. Following the police officers’ refusal to hand the woman over, the confrontation between the two forces turned violent, leaving one person dead and five more seriously injured. The youth comprising the mob also torched the police station and looted policemen’s and Christians’ homes. According to the local chief of police, “The youths ... insisted on taking the law into their own hands.”¹¹⁷

III. Blasphemy Laws and Violations of Freedom of Religion, Thought, or Belief

The “defamation of religions” concept creates particular problems for adherents of minority faiths that are deemed heretical or blasphemous by a nation’s majority or state-backed religious establishments. The laws perpetuate prejudice, promote religious intolerance, and prevent the discussion of views which some segments of the population may find offensive. Those who have backed resolutions supporting the “defamation of religions” concept claim its introduction into national legislation will protect freedom of religion and discourage human rights violations. However, where national blasphemy laws already exist, the enforcement of such laws shows that they in fact have been used to violate freedom of religion and criminalize the expression and practice of minority religions.

- **Indonesia:** On March 14, 2012, Andreas Guntur, the leader of the spiritual group Amanat Keagungan Ilahi (AKI), was sentenced to four years in prison for blasphemy. A fatwa was issued against AKI by the Indonesia Council of Ulema in 2009, claiming that they rejected conventional Islamic rituals.¹¹⁸
- **Pakistan:** On March 14, 2012, Naseem Ahmed, a 42-year-old father of three, was convicted of desecrating the Koran and sentenced to life imprisonment. Ahmed claims that when he set a stack of school books on fire, he had no idea that the Koran was in the pile. A neighbor overheard Ahmed being admonished and called the police.¹¹⁹
- **Indonesia:** In January 2012, police arrested 31-year-old atheist Alexander Aan for questioning the existence of God on Facebook. Aan was taken into custody shortly after he was attacked by an angry mob. His attackers were not arrested.¹²⁰
- **Pakistan:** In January 2012, Soofi Mohammad Ishaq, a cleric, was sentenced to death and ten years imprisonment for blasphemy, under sections 295-A and 295-C of the Pakistan Penal Code. Allegations were brought by rival clerics, who reportedly viewed Ishaq's followers treating him like a prophet.¹²¹
- **Pakistan:** In December 2011, 25-year-old Khurram Masih, an illiterate Christian laborer, was charged with blasphemy. Ordered to collect the trash after completing a job, he unknowingly burned a copy of the Koran. Co-workers beat him and brought him to the police station.¹²²
- **Saudi Arabia:** On November 14, 2011, a 45-year-old Australian citizen, Mansor Almaribe, was arrested and charged with insulting the companions of the Prophet Muhammad. He was in Saudi Arabia to take part in the Hajj pilgrimage. Unable to afford a lawyer, Almaribe was found guilty of blasphemy and sentenced to one year in prison in addition to 500 lashes. Australian officials intervened and his sentence was ultimately reduced to 75 lashes. He was reportedly allowed to wear a leather jacket during the lashing. Almaribe returned to Australia on January 13, 2012.¹²³
- **Pakistan:** On September 9, 2011, Aslam Masih, a Christian man accused of blasphemy by two members of the Islamic movement Tablighi Jamaat in 2010, died in prison after officials allegedly failed to provide proper care for a treatable disease. The prison administration cited security concerns for denying treatment. The case against Masih was initially dropped due to a lack of evidence but reinstated as a result of pressure exerted by extremists.¹²⁴
- **Pakistan:** On July 17, 2011, Shaukat Ali, a 35-year-old described as mentally challenged, died in Lahore Camp Jail after being imprisoned for more than four years without access to psychiatric treatment. Ali was arrested in January 2007 and charged under section 295-B of Pakistan's Penal Code for allegedly desecrating the Koran. Police and jail authorities claim that Ali had been ill, while his family has challenged such claims.¹²⁵
- **Pakistan:** On July 6, 2011, Rafiq Ahmed, a barber, was arrested and charged with blasphemy after being accused by a local prayer leader of using pages from the Koran to clean mirrors at his shop. Ahmed claimed that he is illiterate and did not know that verses of the Koran were written on the papers. The barber shop has been closed and Ahmed's family has fled.¹²⁶
- **Kuwait:** A professor at Kuwait University was arrested in July 2011 and charged with blasphemy after he was overheard cursing God during an argument with a friend at a café in Salmiya.¹²⁷

- **Pakistan:** On May 30, 2011, a group of politicians and clerics urged the Supreme Court of Pakistan to declare passages in the Bible as blasphemous. They claimed that Islamic prophets are characterized as flawed in certain Biblical passages. If the court does not comply, efforts will be made to formally ban the Bible.¹²⁸
- **Algeria:** On May 25, 2011, Siagh Krimo was sentenced to five years in prison and a substantial fine for sharing a CD about Christianity with one of his neighbors. Krimo was charged with blasphemy and prosecuted under Article 144 bis 2 of the Algerian Penal Code which criminalizes acts that “insult the Prophet and any of the messengers of God, or denigrate the creed and precepts of Islam, whether by writing, drawing, declaration, or any other means.”¹²⁹ The five-year sentence—the maximum sentence for blasphemy—was significantly harsher than the two-year prison term the prosecutor had proposed in light of the prosecution’s failure to present the testimony of the accuser. Krimo has appealed the decision.¹³⁰
- **Malaysia:** Religious authorities detained at least 130 Shias in December 2010 as they observed the Day of Ashura, a Shia holy day, in their prayer room near Kuala Lumpur. The accused are charged with insulting religious authorities and denying, violating, or disputing a *fatwa* (religious decree) of their directives. Their hearing had been scheduled for March 2011 but was postponed to an undetermined date. Shia Muslims have been deemed a deviant sect in Malaysia and barred from proselytizing.¹³¹
- **Egypt:** In October 2010, after Egyptian security officials rounded up at least 2 dozen men near Cairo, 4 Shias were arrested and charged with “insulting religion and denying the tenets of faith”¹³² under Egypt’s emergency law. Among the detainees was Safaa Al Awadi, an Australian national who after weeks in detention, was released in November 2010 and returned to his country. Since 2009, other Shias have been charged and detained for allegedly “forming a group trying to spread Shia ideology that harms the Islamic religion.”¹³³
- **Bangladesh:** On June 29, 2010, three of the top leaders of Jamaat-e-Islami (Jel), one of the country’s most powerful political parties, were arrested on charges of “hurting religious sentiments of Islam.”¹³⁴ The Secretary General of the Bangladesh Tarikat Federation filed the complaint, accusing the Jamaat leaders of comparing their party’s chief, Motiur Rahman Nizami, with the Prophet Muhammad. Clashes between the Bangladesh police and supporters of Jamaat-e-Islami occurred as a result of the arrests. In July, 2010, more than 100 protestors belonging to Jel were arrested during demonstrations organized in response to the allegations made against their leaders.¹³⁵
- **Iran:** In June 2010, five members of the Church of Iran, including one woman, were found guilty of crimes against the Islamic Order. They were sentenced to one-year imprisonment but released on bail after serving eight months. They have appealed this sentence and are awaiting the decision.¹³⁶ In April 2011, the blasphemy trial of these individuals began, along with a sixth member of the Church of Iran. If convicted, the defendants face the death penalty for these crimes. The trial has been adjourned twice—initially due to lack of prosecutorial evidence and subsequently to allow prosecutors to consult with Iran’s traditional churches in order to assess the validity of the charge.¹³⁷
- **Indonesia:** In May 2010, Bakri Abdullah, a 70-year-old self-proclaimed prophet and the leader of a small religious group, was convicted of blasphemy and sentenced to one year in jail by the Selong District Court on Lombok Island. Neighbors, angered by Abdullah’s claims to have

ascended from a mountain into heaven two times, reported him to the police.¹³⁸

- **Egypt:** On March 15, 2010, officers of the State Security Investigations arrested nine members of the Ahmadi faith, confiscated their books and computers, and detained them under Egypt's Emergency Law. The detainees were held in the Istiqbaal Tora Prison for up to six weeks before being brought before the Supreme State Security Prosecutor's office on charges of "showing contempt for the Islamic religion" under Article 98(f) of the Penal Code. On May 12, the wife of one of the detainees was also arrested on the same charges; she was released after a second interrogation date was set.¹³⁹ According to a report, the detainees were still being held in June and had been subjected to "torture including verbal abuse, beatings and electric shocks."¹⁴⁰ On May 31, the detention order expired at which time they were placed under a preventive detention order. By June 8, all nine detainees were released.¹⁴¹
- **Egypt:** The State Security Intelligence service arrested 45-year-old Ashraf Thabet in March 2010 after he was accused of violating Article 98 of the Penal Code, which criminalizes defaming a 'heavenly religion' and insulting Islam. After being held in solitary confinement for 132 days, he was released from prison in August 2010 without a court hearing. The government, however, continues to charge him with defamation. He receives frequent death threats and fears another arrest.¹⁴²
- **Pakistan:** On January 19, 2010, five Christians charged with insulting Islam in April 2007, were released after Christian and Islamic leaders issued a joint *fatwa* (religious decree) to persuade the district judge that the men were innocent and that charges against them should be dropped. This was the first time that a verdict has been reached through direct negotiations in Pakistan. Accusations of blasphemy stemmed from an argument that arose between two children, a Christian and a Muslim, one of whom dropped a sticker containing a reference to the Prophet Muhammad on the ground. As many as 2,000 Muslims attacked a Christian neighborhood as a result of the blasphemy accusation.¹⁴³
- **Pakistan:** In 2009, 37 Ahmadis were charged under the country's blasphemy laws.¹⁴⁴ In a related development, the Pakistani Supreme Court upheld a constitutional law which forbids Ahmadis from practicing their faith as Muslims and calling their faith Islam. The Court asserted that self-identification of the Ahmadis as Muslims offends and outrages the religious feelings of Pakistan's Sunni Muslims. Approximately 3.5 million Ahmadis live in Pakistan. The law prohibits them from engaging in any Muslim practices, including use of Muslim greetings; referring to their places of worship as mosques; reciting Islamic prayers; using specific Islamic terms; and participating in the Hajj pilgrimage or the fast of Ramadan.¹⁴⁵
- **Indonesia:** On June 2, 2009, Lia Aminuddin (a.k.a. Lia Eden), the leader of the Eden Community (Jamaah Alamulla) in Jakarta, was convicted of blasphemy and incitement to hatred for proselytizing. Eden believes that she is the messenger Gabriel and the Holy Spirit. She was sentenced to two and a half years in prison. In 2007, Eden was released from prison after serving sixteen months of a two-year sentence for a separate blasphemy conviction. Wahyu Wibisono, Eden's follower, was also sentenced to two years in prison for writing about Eden's religious concept.¹⁴⁶ In November 2007, Lia Eden's son was sentenced to three years in prison for "claiming to be the reincarnation of the Prophet Muhammad."¹⁴⁷
- **Indonesia:** In June 2009, the Kupang District Police in East Nusa Tenggara

arrested the leader and several followers of the “Sion City of Allah” Christian group on charges of blasphemy. The group is led by Nimbrot Lasbuan, a self-proclaimed prophet. The government banned the “Sion City of Allah”—based exclusively on the book of Jeremiah—as an “unorthodox” branch of Christianity and forbade its followers from attending church until 2011.¹⁴⁸

- **Pakistan:** On June 18, 2008, Muhammad Shafeeq Latif was sentenced to death for blasphemy after he allegedly defiled the Koran and used derogatory language to refer to the Prophet Muhammad. Shafeeq Latif was arrested in 2006. He remains jailed in Sialkot, Punjab.¹⁴⁹
- **Indonesia:** In May 2008, Dedi Priadi and Gerry Lufthi Yudistira were convicted of blasphemy under Article 156a of the Indonesian Constitution and sentenced to three years in prison.¹⁵⁰ Their conviction stemmed from their leadership role in the Al-Qiyadah Al-Islamiyah group, which the court has declared to be counter to mainstream Islamic beliefs.
- **Indonesia:** In April 2008, Abdula Salam (a.k.a. Ahmad Moshaddeq), founder of the Al-Qiyadah al-Islamiyah group and a self-proclaimed prophet, was sentenced to four years in prison by the Padang District Court despite his recantation. Salam was accused of inciting public hostility in conjunction with tarnishing the image of Islam. The Indonesian Council of Ulemas, the country’s highest authority on Islam, declared Al-Qiyadah heretical. The Court subsequently sentenced two other members of the sect to three years in prison under Article 156(a) of the Criminal Code.¹⁵¹ In November 2008, Indonesian authorities issued a ban against the group, estimated to have about 40,000 followers. More than 150 individuals have been arrested or detained under Article 156a, according to which “expressing feelings of hostility, hatred or contempt against religions” and disgracing a religion” are punishable by up to five years in prison.¹⁵²
- **Algeria:** In February 2008, three Christians—Youssef Ourahmane, Rachid Seghir, and Hamid Ramdani—were charged under Ordinance 06-03 for “blaspheming the name of the Prophet Muhammad and Islam,” sentenced to three years in prison and fined. The men were accused by Shamouma Al-Aid, who had converted to Christianity and then reconverted to Islam. On October 29, 2008, a court in Ain-al Turck acquitted all of the accused.¹⁵³
- **Iran:** In 2008, seven Baha’i leaders were arrested and detained without being charged. Ultimately, they were found guilty of “insulting religious sanctities” and other crimes and sentenced to twenty years imprisonment. On appeal, the decision was reduced to 10 years. In March 2011, the original twenty-year term was reinstated.¹⁵⁴
- **Indonesia:** In November 2007, Abdul Rahman, a member of the Eden Community, was convicted of blasphemy for claiming to be a reincarnation of the Prophet Muhammad, and sentenced to three years in prison.¹⁵⁵
- **Nigeria:** In October 2007, Sani Kabili, a 55-year-old Christian, was sentenced to three years in prison by a Sharia court, without the right to appeal, after three men accused him of blasphemy against Islam and the Prophet Muhammad. Kabili was released on February 16, 2009, after serving 300 days of his sentence, on the grounds of a lack of evidence. His lawyer pointed out several discrepancies in the original trial including trying a non-Muslim in an Islamic court without permission.¹⁵⁶
- **Pakistan:** In May 2007, Younis Masih, a Pakistani of Christian faith, was sentenced to death for committing blasphemy under Section 295-C of the Pakistani Penal Code. An Islamic cleric accused Masih of making derogatory

remarks about the Prophet Muhammad at a religious service in October 2005. Masih was attacked by inmates during his detention at the Kot Lakhpot jail, where he is currently awaiting action on a second petition filed on his behalf in the Lahore High Court. Parvez Aslam Choudry, Masih's lawyer, has been assaulted and received numerous death threats since representing Masih and others accused of blasphemy.¹⁵⁷

- **Indonesia:** In April 2007, 42 Protestants were detained for distributing a “prayer video” that instructs individuals to put the Koran on the ground, and to pray for the conversion of Indonesia’s Muslim political leaders. In September 2007, a local court found all of the detainees guilty of insulting religion, and sentenced each to five years in prison.¹⁵⁸
- **Afghanistan:** The Baha’i Faith was ruled to be distinct from Islam and condemned as a form of blasphemy by Afghanistan’s Supreme Court in 2007. Muslims who convert to Baha’ism are considered apostates.¹⁵⁹
- **Pakistan:** In October 2006, James Masih and Buta Masih, both Catholic, were convicted of blasphemy under section 295-B of the Pakistani Criminal Code, sentenced to terms of ten years in prison, and each fined 25,000 rupees. The men, aged 70 and 65 at the time of their arrest, were accused by neighbors of publicly burning copies of the Koran. After serving two and a half years of their terms, both men were released on April 17, 2009.¹⁶⁰
- **Saudi Arabia:** Hadi Saeed Al Mutif, one of the longest held religious prisoners in the world, has been in jail since January 1994. He was convicted of making an offensive remark about the Prophet Muhammad during afternoon prayers while attending a police training camp. Just 18 years old at the time, three of his colleagues reported Al Mutif’s alleged comment to local authorities. Though his initial punishment was to stand under the

Saudi flag for two hours, he was later found guilty in a court of law and sentenced to death in 1996. All appeals have been denied. After telling his story on *Al Hurra* in 2007, Al Mutif was placed in solitary confinement. On March 29, 2010, he was moved from a maximum security prison to a local jail due to abuses suffered at the hands of inmates. The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) and other international organizations have requested Al Mutif’s release.¹⁶¹

IV. Blasphemy Laws Used as a Weapon to Settle Private Disputes

The loose and unclear language of existing blasphemy laws—along with procedures in some countries which allow private individuals to initiate blasphemy cases without prosecutorial or judicial review—provides dangerous ammunition to those who have used them to victimize individuals and as a weapon in private disputes. Accusations of blasphemy are often the byproduct of disputes between neighbors, colleagues, political opponents, religious and academic leaders, and business associates whose dealings have become adversarial. Given the severity of the punishment provided under many of the national blasphemy laws, the ease with which one may initiate a proceeding raises serious concerns of due process and the right to a fair trial. The use of blasphemy laws to settle disputes is most prevalent in Pakistan. Though successive governments have recognized that these laws are abused, they have been either unwilling or unable to adopt the reforms necessary to address this problem. The most recent attempt to amend the blasphemy laws in Pakistan has been derailed by the murder of Governor Salmaan Taseer on January 4, 2011, by Mumtaz Hussein Qadri, his personal body guard. Qadri openly admits to assassinating the Governor because of his opposition to the country’s blasphemy laws and stated that he found justification for his act under Islamic

law. Minister for Minority Affairs Shahbaz Bhatti—who like Governor Taseer was outspoken in his commitment to reform the blasphemy laws—was assassinated on March 2, 2011.¹⁶²

- **Pakistan:** On February 28, 2012, the 26-year-old Christian mother of a five-month old child was charged with insulting the Prophet Muhammad. Shamim’s family claims that she was falsely accused of blasphemy by relatives for refusing to convert to Islam.¹⁶³
- **Pakistan:** On December 18, 2011, Sajjad Masih admitted to sending blasphemous text messages to clerics and prayer leaders in the name of his fiancé in order to punish her for breaking their engagement. He was charged under Sections 295-C and 295-B of Pakistan’s Penal Code and 25-D of the telegraph Act.¹⁶⁴
- **Pakistan:** On April 10, 2011, Gulzar Masih, a Christian bookstore owner, and his son Suleman were forced to flee their home after being accused of blasphemy by a former business partner-turned-rival. Word spread quickly about the blasphemy charge and a mob assembled and tried to set the store on fire. The police intervened—preventing the mob from burning the shop—but no charges were filed for the attempted arson.¹⁶⁵
- **Pakistan:** On April 5, 2011, Arif Masih, a 40-year-old Christian man, was arrested after being falsely accused of tearing pages from the Koran and sending letters threatening Muslims to convert to Christianity. The accusations stemmed from a land dispute with a Muslim neighbor. The Masih Foundation presented affidavits from 50 witnesses who attested to Masih’s innocence which helped to secure his release. For their protection, the Masih Foundation found a safe hiding place for the entire family.¹⁶⁶
- **Pakistan:** On February 16, 2011, Agnes Nuggo (also known as Naggu Bibi), a 50-year-old Christian woman from Faisalabad, was accused by neighbors of making statements insulting to Islam following a property dispute. The local police registered a case against Nuggo pursuant to Section 295-A of Pakistan’s Penal Code, which carries a prison term of up to three years and a possible fine. Pursuant to the law, the testimony of the neighbors is all that is required to bring charges against the accused. Agnes Nuggo claims that the accusations made against her are fabricated and that she is innocent.¹⁶⁷
- **Pakistan:** On February 7, 2011, Shafique, a shopkeeper in Punjab, was arrested for “hurting the religious sentiment” of local residents when he allegedly tied a shoe to a flag bearing a holy symbol in front of his shop. A case was filed against him under Section 298-A of Pakistan’s Penal Code which prohibits the use of derogatory remarks against holy personages and a penalty of up to three years in prison.¹⁶⁸
- **Pakistan:** On February 2, 2011, a man from Punjab province was convicted of blasphemy and sentenced to death under Section 295-C of Pakistan’s blasphemy laws for wearing a slab around his neck allegedly inscribed with blasphemous remarks against Sihaba, a companion of the Prophet Muhammad. The accused, who goes by the name of Rafiq, claims to be mentally disabled and is seeking a pardon.¹⁶⁹ Rafiq was also fined 200,000 rupees under Sections 295-C, which prohibits the use of derogatory remarks in respect to the Holy Prophet and fined an additional 10,000 rupees under Section 298-A, which prohibits the use of derogatory remarks in respect of holy personages.
- **Pakistan:** On January 31, 2011, Muhammad Shafi, a prayer leader at a mosque in Punjab, and his 20-year-old son Muhammad Aslam were sentenced to life imprisonment (or 25 years) under

Section 295-A of Pakistan's Penal Code which deals with "deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or belief."¹⁷⁰ The accused allegedly tore down a poster outside their grocery shop which contained Koranic verses advertising an Islamic event commemorating the anniversary of the Prophet Muhammad's birth.¹⁷¹ Muhammad Shafi and his son also received fines totaling 210,000 rupees and an additional five years in prison under Section 7-G of the Anti-Terrorism Act. The attorney for the accused claims that the verdict was the result of "interfaith rivalries" and is planning to appeal the verdict in the Lahore High Court.¹⁷²

- **Pakistan:** On January 5, 2011, Muhammad Amjad, a man known throughout his community to be mentally challenged since birth, was charged under Section 295-B of the blasphemy laws after a local cleric accused him of setting the Koran on fire in the courtyard of the mosque. The cleric, who did not witness the burning, also accused Amjad's father and another relative of conspiring to desecrate the Koran. Residents and local human rights activists claim that a longstanding rift existed between the cleric and Amjad's family and that the blasphemy law was being used by the cleric to settle a score with his rivals.¹⁷³
- **Pakistan:** In December 2010, Hector Aleem, human rights activist and founder of Peace Worldwide, an NGO which seeks to reconcile Christian and Muslim religious and cultural differences through peaceful dialogue, was sentenced to seven years in prison and a fine of 50,000 Pakistani rupees. Aleem had been arrested at his home in the middle of the night on January 22, 2009 on charges of blasphemy under Section 295-C of Pakistan's Penal Code for sending a blasphemous text message from his cell phone. His attorney said that a local man

framed his client following a land dispute in which Aleem had defended the rights of Christians. The blasphemy charges were dropped after evidence was introduced proving that the text message did not come from Aleem's cell phone—but charges of abetting blasphemy remain in place. On January 30, large crowds gathered outside the Anti-Terrorist Court condemning Aleem and demanding that he be put to death. The judge denied bail on April 30, claiming it was for Aleem's protection after a religious extremist lawyer threatened his life during a court hearing.¹⁷⁴ The judge and lawyer in the case have been threatened and Aleem's wife and four children have gone into hiding. In June, Aleem disappeared from his jail cell for five days. Aleem's daughter, who spoke with her father at a July 1 hearing, said that he had been taken from his cell by members of the Federal Investigation Agency and tortured at an unknown location. His hands and feet were swollen and bruised and "he could barely stand."¹⁷⁵ In June 2011, Aleem was acquitted of the blasphemy charges however he remains in jail on other charges.¹⁷⁶

- **Pakistan:** On December 9, 2010, Dr. Naushad Valiyani was arrested and charged with insulting the Prophet Muhammad. According to Police Chief Mushtaq Shah, the arrest was made after the complainant, a pharmaceuticals company representative, informed the police that Valiyani had thrown his business card, which contained his name, Muhammad Faizan, in the garbage during a service call to the clinic, thus allegedly defaming the Prophet Muhammad. Dr. Valiyani apologized to Faizan for discarding the card.¹⁷⁷ Although local leaders insisted that blasphemy charges be filed, Valiyani was released soon after his arrest.¹⁷⁸
- **Pakistan:** On November 18, 2010, 22-year-old Latif Masih, a Christian from

Punjab Province, was allegedly shot dead by two Muslim extremists near his home after he was released from jail where he served a 5 month sentence for allegedly desecrating the Koran. Inspector Rafique Ahmed said that Masih's murder was most likely linked to the blasphemy charges. On November 3, Latif Masifh was released on bail after Ijaz Ahmed, the complainant, informed the court that he was not sure that the accused was guilty. The victim's brother claims that charges had been filed because "Ahmed sought to take possession of his brother's shop."¹⁷⁹

- **Pakistan:** On November 8, 2010, Aasia Bibi, a Christian farm worker and mother of five, was sentenced to death under Section 295-C of Pakistan's Penal Code, which carries a mandatory death sentence for defaming the Prophet Muhammed. Aasia Bibi was accused of making blasphemous comments following a disagreement with Muslim co-workers who refused to drink from a container of water she carried, believing it to be tainted. On November 29, the Lahore Court barred Pakistan's President Asif Ali Zarari from issuing a pardon, claiming that Bibi's appeal had not been exhausted in the courts. Extremists have promised to take the law into their own hands if she is released. An imam from a local mosque has offered a \$6,000 reward to anyone who takes her life if the death sentence is not upheld. Two of Bibi's most prominent advocates, Governor Salmaan Taseer and Minority Affairs Minister Shahbaz Bhatti, were assassinated in 2011 because of their opposition to the blasphemy laws and for speaking out on her behalf. Pope Benedict called for Bibi to be pardoned and for the blasphemy laws—which he described as a pretext for violence against religious minorities—to be repealed.¹⁸⁰ Bibi's husband and children have received death threats and have been forced to go into hiding. In October

2011, Pakistan's Federal Ministry for interreligious harmony appointed a delegate to ensure the safety of Aasia Bibi following press reports that she had been mistreated in jail where she remains in solitary confinement.¹⁸¹

- **Pakistan:** On June 19, 2010, Rehmat Masih, a 73-year-old Pakistani Christian, was accused of blaspheming the Prophet Muhammad under section 295-C of the Pakistani Penal Code. He is currently being held at the District Jail in Faisalabad. Local residents claim that the accusation of blasphemy stems from a land dispute between the accuser and the Christian community.¹⁸² On November 18, 2011, the case against Masih was dismissed for lack of evidence.¹⁸³
- **Indonesia:** On June 1, 2010, FX Marjono, a former lecturer at Widya Dharma University in Klaten, was found guilty of religious defamation and sentenced to two years in prison. The charges stem from statements he made during a ten minute opening speech at the examination of four honors students presenting their theses at the university.¹⁸⁴
- **Pakistan:** On March 21, 2010, Rubina Bibi, a Christian mother of three, was charged with blasphemy under section 295-C¹⁸⁵ of the Pakistani Penal Code for making derogatory remarks against Muhammad during a quarrel with a local resident who refused to grant her a refund for food she had purchased.¹⁸⁶ On April 20, she was denied bail and the court transferred her case to Wazirabad, presumably because of pressure from local groups.¹⁸⁷ Represented by Joseph Francis, the Pakistani director of CLAAS, the Centre for Legal Aid Assistance and Settlement, she was exonerated on August 16, 2010. Mr. Francis claimed that Rubina Bibi was pressured into making a false confession. While being held at Gujranwala Jail with her one-year-old son, the rest of her family went into hiding

after receiving violent threats. Rubina Bibi was allegedly told that charges against her would be dropped if she converted to Islam.¹⁸⁸

- **Pakistan:** On March 3, 2010, Ruqqiya Bibi and her husband Munir Masih were sentenced to 25 years in prison for defiling the Koran after they allegedly touched the holy book with unwashed hands.¹⁸⁹ The couple were charged under Section 295-B of Pakistan’s Penal Code. Their lawyer said that the charges arose out of a quarrel between Muslim and Christian children and that it was an example of blasphemy statutes being used to “settle personal scores.” Bail was granted in January 2010 despite the protest of more than 20 Muslim clergy who stormed the court house to protest the proceeding. According to the Centre for Legal Aid Assistance and Settlement (CLAAS), a lawyer for the prosecution threatened to kill Ruqqiya Bibi.¹⁹⁰ Munir Masih was released from the Sahiwal Prison on December 9, 2010, but his wife remains in detention. Ruqqiya Bibi, who is kept in solitary confinement due to threats from within the prison, is reportedly in bad health and not receiving medical attention.¹⁹¹
- **Pakistan:** In January 2010, Imran Masih, a 22-year-old Christian shopkeeper, was sentenced to life imprisonment for desecrating the Koran and outraging religious feelings after a rival shopkeeper accused him of burning pages of the holy book. The accuser, who has pledged that Masih will not get out of jail alive, used a mosque loudspeaker to incite a mob that beat Masih and ransacked his shop.¹⁹² A member of All Pakistan Minorities Alliance (APMA) said that Masih’s case “was just one in a long line of incidents in which blasphemy laws have been used to settle personal grudges.”¹⁹³ On October 29, 2010, Masih was admitted to the intensive care unit of District Hospital Hazro after being stoned by prison inmates yelling that he was a blasphemer and must be killed.¹⁹⁴
- **Pakistan:** In September 2009, Fanish Masih, a 19-year-old Christian accused of throwing a chapter of the Koran down the drain, was charged with blasphemy for desecrating the Koran. Masih was held in solitary confinement and found dead in his jail cell within a few days. The police claim that he committed suicide; the National Commission for Truth and Justice called the death an “extrajudicial murder.”¹⁹⁵ At his funeral, a mob torched a church and many Christians had to flee to safety.
- **Indonesia:** In July 2009, Agus Iman Solihin, the self-proclaimed leader of the Satria Piningit Weteng Buwono, was convicted of blasphemy under Article 156 of the Penal Code. Solihin, who claims to have received spiritual guidance from Sukarno, Indonesia’s first president, was accused of “conducting ritual orgies and banning his followers from observing Muslim prayers.”¹⁹⁶ Solihin was sentenced to two years and six months in prison.
- **Pakistan:** In January 2009, Pastor Shafiq Masih and his 17-year-old brother, Naveed Aziz, were accused of blasphemy when a fellow student noticed “blasphemous material” in Aziz’s bag. Charges were dropped due to the intervention of a Pakistani NGO. It has been alleged that the accusation was used to settle a personal grudge.¹⁹⁷
- **Pakistan:** On January 28, 2009, five Ahmadis were arrested for committing blasphemy under Section 295-C of the Pakistani Penal Code, including four students in ninth and tenth grade and one adult, Mubashar Ahmed, for writing the name of the Prophet Muhammad on the walls of a bathroom stall at a mosque in Punjab province.¹⁹⁸ According to reports, no investigation took place prior to the arrest, and the police were not aware of any substantial evidence that linked the

students with the crime. The police informed family members of the accused that they were under pressure from religious fundamentalists to act against the students.¹⁹⁹ The students were not released until July, even though withdrawal of the charges had been recommended in March. The action was allegedly instigated by a member of Lashkar-e-Tayyaba, a banned militant organization.

- **Pakistan:** In June 2008, six Ahmadis were arrested and charged with blasphemy in Kotri, Sindh. The arrests took place after a dispute over the construction of an Ahmadi prayer center and protests from mullahs of Tahaffuz

Khatam-e-Nabuwwat, an anti- Ahmadiyya religious clerical group.²⁰⁰

- **Saudi Arabia:** On March 31, 2008, Sabri Bogday, a 31-year-old Turkish national who owns a barber shop in Jeddah, was convicted of blasphemy and sentenced to death. He was arrested for insulting Islam after the police received complaints that he was heard swearing at God during an argument with an Egyptian neighbor. The Appellate Court upheld his conviction but on January 29, 2009, Bogday was pardoned by the King and returned to Turkey. During the trial he was denied access to either an attorney or a translator.²⁰¹

Endnotes

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