

Market Drayton Churches Together: IDOP - 17 November 2018

PAKISTAN

13 Nov: International Christian Concern

Pakistani Christians Fear Backlash Over Asia Bibi Acquittal

<https://www.persecution.org/2018/11/14/pakistani-christians-fear-backlash-asia-bibi-acquittal>

Pakistani Christians are reportedly living in fear that their community will face severe backlash following the acquittal of Asia Bibi. On October 31, Bibi, a Christian woman formally on death row for committing blasphemy, was acquitted of all charges by Pakistan's Supreme Court.

Bibi's blasphemy case has been at the center of a contentious and violent debate over Pakistan's notorious blasphemy laws. Following the announcement of the Supreme Court's decision, mobs of hardliners took to the streets in protest. According to Peter Jacob, the Executive Director of the Center for Social Justice, Christians were targeted for assault by the rioters.

"The situation on the roads is very tense today," a Christian from Lahore, speaking on condition of anonymity, told ICC immediately following Bibi's acquittal. "Muslims have blocked the roads, set fire to tires, and are protesting continuously. Christian are feeling very insecure."

"The situation all over the country is very tough," another Christian from Sindh, also speaking on condition of anonymity, reported. "Serious threats are being expected. All over the country is blocked now because people are demonstrating against the decision. Remember us in your prayers."

While Bibi and her family remain under tight security in Pakistan, many Christians fear that when Bibi is allowed to flee the country the Christian community at large will be held responsible. Fears of attacks on individual Christians, Christian neighbourhoods, and churches are being taken seriously and Pakistan has deployed security officers to these locations.

13 Nov: Open Doors UK

Lights in the darkness: The courageous faith of the church in Pakistan

<https://www.opendoorsuk.org/news/stories/pakistan-180425>

Imagine being told that if you go to church, you could die. Would you dare to go?

This was the situation facing a group of Christians one Easter in Pakistan. The Taliban, the self-proclaimed Islamic State and other Islamic extremist groups had sent out warnings that Christians would suffer during Easter. The Christians knew they were serious – church bombings have become horrifically frequent in Pakistan, particularly around Christian celebrations such as Easter and Christmas.

But despite the very real danger, this group of Christians decided to gather in their church the night before Easter – the threats of extremists would not stop them from meeting to worship Jesus.

Each person held a candle, but the church leader had forgotten to tell people to come and light them from a candle at the front. Then a little girl, just six years old, went forward to light her candle, and began to walk around the room and use her candle to light others.

An Open Doors partner asked the little girl why she thought the candles needed to be lit. Thinking of the frequent power cuts her family experienced, the little girl replied, "Because the candles remind us that even in the darkness of the tomb, there was the hope of Jesus' promise. When Jesus makes a promise it is like a candle given to us when the lights go out. It is a promise that the lights will come back on again."

It was a promise the Christians needed to hold on to. The next day, on Easter Sunday, a bomb attack in Lahore killed 75 Christians, and injured hundreds of others.

Pakistan is number five on the 2018 World Watch List, Open Doors' ranking of the 50 countries where Christians face the most extreme persecution. In many ways, Pakistan can seem like a land of great darkness. Christians are a tiny minority: the official figure is just 3.9 million in a country of 197 million, and they face daily discrimination and frequent violent attacks. The nation's infamous blasphemy laws are abused to target Christians, with accusations leading to Christians being imprisoned or killed. An estimated 700 Christian women and girls are abducted and forced to marry every year.

And yet, the light of the gospel does continue to shine through the faith and courage of our Pakistani brothers and sisters, and your prayers and support are helping to keep that light shining.

'The Church Has to Come to Them'

While going to church in Pakistan can be dangerous, recent research by Open Doors experts suggests that there are up to five million Christians in Pakistan with no church to go to, even if they wanted to. These are extremely poor Christians living in rural Pakistan, too far from the nearest church to reach by foot, or prevented from attending by their employers. Most are also illiterate, meaning that they can't even read the Bible for themselves. An Open Doors partner in Pakistan says, "The greatest tragedy is when people say they are Christians but they don't know Christ."

Those who know a little hold on to what they have. "There are those among these isolated persecuted Christians who have memorised the scriptures," says an Open Doors partner involved in outreach to brick kiln workers. "They teach it to those around them on the brick making fields as they are not able to go to church or attend gatherings, which are seen as a threat to their employers."

Others know virtually nothing about their faith. One of these isolated Christians is Shahzad. He can't read and doesn't know what the Bible says. But he does know about persecution. He says, "Some of the business men who hire day labourers won't hire me if they know I am a Christian. Everybody has access to the village's water pump, but my son and daughter are not allowed to drink there."

Shahzad and his family must endure all this – yet they are unable to read the Bible for encouragement, and they don't have a good understanding of the gospel to give them hope. When asked where he looks for hope, Shahzad says, "If I can give money to the locals, or if I perform rituals at the grave of a pir (a 'holy person') my life will improve."

An Open Doors partner says, "These people cannot go to a church. What can you do? There's only one solution. The church has to come to them. That's why this year we will send out mobile church teams to these isolated Christian communities. See them as a church on wheels. The trucks are managed by people trained by us. We will bring music, films about the Bible and Jesus, and also literature for those who can read. We will meet the people where they are and teach them basic Christianity. We'll tell them about Jesus and show them His love."

One of those reaching out to rural Christians is 83-year-old Pastor 'Samuel'. He left his village 26 years ago, tired of the isolation and persecution he faced in rural Pakistan, and went to

the city. But now, even at this late stage of life, he feels called to return to his village.

He says, “We want to be there for the Christians and we teach people from the Bible. They have to discover that there’s not only false hope in this world; true hope can be found in Jesus. If they knew Him and how He has suffered for them to make things right with God, that would give true meaning to their lives.”

In John 8:12, Jesus said “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” Your prayers and support are helping to bring the light of life to our brothers and sisters in rural Pakistan, so they no longer have to walk in darkness.

Adding Colour to God’s Painting

Just 49 per cent of people in rural Pakistan can read, according to the 2017 the Economic Survey of Pakistan. But over the past 30 years, your prayers and support have enabled Open Doors local church partners in Pakistan to teach an incredible 100,000 men and women to read and write!

One of them is Aroona*. She stopped going to school when she was six, so she could help to take care of her younger siblings while her mother went out to work as a cleaner. But ten years later, when she was 16, your prayers and support enabled her to learn to read and write and now she’s passing on that skill to others.

Aroona says, “The day I learned to read was the best day of my life. When I teach my students to read I feel like I have added colours to God’s painting before He comes back. I can tell them about Jesus and show them the stories in the Bible. There are all kinds of myths about Jesus. If we cannot read, we cannot tell the difference between myth and truth.”

13 Nov: The Guardian - Patrick Wintour

Foreign Office ‘allowed Pakistan mob to dictate Asia Bibi asylum case’

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/nov/13/asia-bibi-foreign-office-accused-of-allowing-pakistan-mob-to-dictate-asia-bibi-asylum-case>

The Foreign Office has been accused of allowing government asylum policy to be dictated to by a Pakistan mob after it was confirmed it urged the Home Office not to grant Asia Bibi political asylum in the UK out of fear for the safety of UK consular staff.

Asia Bibi, a Christian woman acquitted of blasphemy, is seeking asylum after threats to her life in Pakistan. The former UK foreign secretary Boris Johnson was among many MPs calling for her and her family to be granted sanctuary in Britain.

The acquittal of the 53-year-old Catholic farmworker by Pakistan’s supreme court last month prompted demonstrations by hardline Islamist parties in Pakistan who had campaigned for her to be hanged.

She remains in protective custody in an undisclosed location in Pakistan after the prime minister, Imran Khan, agreed to allow a petition against the court’s decision as part of a deal to halt the protests.

Her husband, Ashiq Masih, has appealed for help to Britain, Canada, Italy and the US but the UK high commissioner in Islamabad is reported to have warned he could not protect his staff if asylum was granted by the UK.

Tom Tugendhat, the foreign affairs select committee chair, asked the Foreign Office permanent secretary, Sir Simon McDonald, whether the episode “does not raise the question that either staff should be withdrawn or security increased or otherwise UK policy is effectively dictated to by a mob?”

Tugendhat took the committee into lengthy private session after McDonald said he did not wish to give evidence in public on a such a sensitive issue

McDonald defended Britain’s efforts to find a third country to take Bibi, saying this would allow UK policy objectives to be achieved without any risk to its staff.

Tugendhat said the episode represented “one of the clearest examples of free conscience being challenged today”.

The senior Labour MP Mike Gapes said: “Given the clear inability of this new Pakistani government of Imran Khan to stop these mobs from intimidating and killing Christians in Pakistan, is it not time to reassess our relations with Pakistan? There are big concerns if religious minorities in Pakistan are not safe.”

McDonald said the Britain’s relationship with Pakistan relationship was important to both countries.

He added: “If the objective is to protect life and some other country can provide some more complete safe harbour, why should the UK not be open to working with that country?”

The Pakistan foreign office confirmed on Tuesday that it had been holding talks with the Canadian foreign ministry over granting Bibi asylum.

Confirmation of talks between the two governments came after the Canadian prime minister, Justin Trudeau, said on Monday his government was talking to Pakistan about the case.

“We are in discussions with the Pakistani government,” Trudeau said in an interview with Agence France-Presse (AFP) in Paris, where he was attending a peace conference organised by the French president, Emmanuel Macron.

Further reading:

The shameful abandonment of Asia Bibi - Melanie Phillips

<http://www.melaniephillips.com/shameful-abandonment-asia-bibi>

The UK should offer safe haven to Asia Bibi, and persecuted Christians like her

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/11/12/uk-should-offer-safe-haven-asia-bibi-persecuted-christians-like>

What’s the point of asylum system if we can’t help a persecuted woman? | Daily Mail Online

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-6382599/Whats-point-asylum-help-persecuted-woman-facing-lynch-mob.html>

Boris Johnson: Britain must help Asia Bibi in fear of lynch mob | Daily Mail Online

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-6382005/Britain-help-brave-mother-fear-lynch-mob.html>

Please Note: links to reports from Christian and secular sources are being regularly added to the following page:

<https://churchestogether-marketdrayton.org.uk/main/p4pc/asia-bibi-updates>

Links to the full reports featured on this sheet, along with information about other relevant articles are available on the Market Drayton Churches Together website, linked from the P4PC section as “Recent Reports”

churchestogether-marketdrayton.org.uk/p4pc

Next P4PC Session - Thursday 6th December at Wollerton URC