



**Summary of ECLJ Petition Filed At United Nations Regarding Acts of Violence
Against Pakistani Christians
August 26, 2009**

The European Centre for Law and Justice (ECLJ) has filed a petition with the United Nations Special Rapporteurs on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, freedom of religion or belief, and Independent Expert on minority issues. This petition highlights a consistent pattern of gross and systematic violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms of Pakistan's Christian minority.

A false rumor of desecration of Qur'an (a punishable offense under Pakistani law) prompted a string of events in Pakistan at the end of July, culminating in attacks by mobs of thousands of religiously-motivated Muslims. On August 1, 2009, mobsters equipped with automatic weapons looted and set fire to at least 50 homes and a church in Christian Town, Gojra. At least seven charred bodies of Pakistani Christian men, women, and children who had been burned alive were found in the rubble. The authorities did not file any charges against the assailants until after the Christians protested by not burying the ones who died in the attack.

The very same rumor had prompted an arson assault two days earlier by a group of about 500 Islamic extremists, on the village of Korian, seven miles from Christian Town. Two churches were desecrated and over 45 Christian homes were looted and burned down as the Christian townspeople were forced to flee. Firefighters could not reach the scene because the assailants blocked the highway.

One month prior to the incident in Gojra, another alleged blasphemy charge sparked an attack by a Muslim mob. As a result of that attack, the homes of roughly 135 Christian families were looted and destroyed, and family members were injured. No one was arrested or prosecuted. Instead, Christians were forced not to file any charges against the Muslim mobsters, if they did, they would face blasphemy charges in return.

These recent attacks are not isolated incidents. During the last decade, over 60 Christians have been killed in at least 27 separate incidents of Muslim on Christian violence, and over 180 have been injured, some severely. Victims have suffered from shootings at churches and schools; bombings of churches, hospitals, and schools; and the destruction of their homes. The Christian population has been devastated financially as the mobs loot and ransack their homes, stealing all their valuables and destroying their homes and means of livelihood.

Apart from the acts of group violence, at least 25 people have been murdered after individual cases of false blasphemy allegations. According to a Pakistani NGO, 833 people were charged under blasphemy laws from 1986 to 2006. According to the United States Department of State,

in 2008, authorities arrested more than 25 Ahmadis, 11 Christians, and 17 Muslims on blasphemy charges.

The sheer number of such incidents shows an appalling trend of governmental failure to protect its minority citizens and a failure to prosecute those who commit religiously-motivated hate crimes. This trend violates international human rights standards as well as Pakistan's domestic laws.

Pakistan is a United Nations member state and as such is bound to accept and carry out the obligations contained in the charter of the United Nations. Pakistan has also ratified the International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD). The Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination has observed that blasphemy laws in Pakistan may violate the right to freedom of religion—a right state parties are obligated to provide their citizens under the treaty. Most of the attacks against minorities are triggered by false allegations of blasphemy against Islam. Blasphemy laws have only led to mob rule and religiously-motivated Muslim attacks against religious minorities.

Pakistan is a signatory to both the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT). Pakistan's blasphemy laws and inaction by authorities to protect minorities are clearly contrary to the object and purpose of the ICCPR and the CAT.

Pakistan has also officially proclaimed the universality of the religious freedom provisions of the ICCPR and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in a draft resolution on Combating Defamation of Religions that it presented to the United Nations on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). Pakistan has expressed its deep concern about discrimination, violence, and negative media reports directed at Muslims, and enforcement of laws that target Muslim minorities after September 11. It asserts that "Islam is frequently and wrongly associated with human rights violations." It "*strongly depl*ores all acts of . . . physical violence and assaults . . . against persons on the basis of their religion" However, Pakistan has not given the same protections to its Christian minorities that it expects other nations to provide to Muslims.

Pakistani authorities may not stand by and allow mob lynching, murder, looting, and destruction to take the place of police procedure. Such behavior is clearly a violation of the UDHR, ICERD, CAT, ICCPR, the U.N. Charter, and Pakistan's own stated position with regard to fundamental rights that should be afforded its citizens. Furthermore, the existence of blasphemy laws violates the principle of the universality of religious freedom, which is proclaimed to be an international human rights standard by Pakistan itself.

The ECLJ's communication to the United Nations urges that the Pakistani government effectively prosecute acts of violence based upon religion. Prosecution is the only deterrent for those who attack innocent minorities on a mullah's call. In addition, the Pakistani government must repeal or procedurally change blasphemy laws. If the government is unable to repeal such draconian laws, it should then provide the same punishment for a wrongfully filed case as is provided for violating the blasphemy laws.