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Written statement* submitted by Centre d'Encadrement et Développement des Anciens Combattants, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[12 August 2024]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



Violence against Ahmedis and Shias: An Unending Phenomenon in Pakistan

Ethnic and religious minorities live under the constant fear of state-sponsored persecution in Pakistan. Sunni extremist groups, with impunity from the Pakistani state authorities, often target religious processions and religious places of Christians, Hindus, Sikhs, Shias, Ahmadis. As the Ahmadi community is considered “non-Muslim” in the constitution of Pakistan, Shias are regularly tagged as “non-Islamic” by Sunni takfiri groups. More importantly, members of both communities are also subjected to fake blasphemy accusations, which can have dire consequences for them. The civilian leadership and the military establishment are simply mute spectators when it comes to safeguarding rights of religious minorities in Pakistan. On the contrary, laws are now stricter and heavily biased in favour of the Sunni hardliners in Pakistan.

The constitution of Pakistan states that, “A person of the Qadiani group or the Lahori group (who call themselves Ahmadis) is a non-Muslim.” (1) In 1984, the country adopted a legal ordinance making it a criminal offense for Ahmadis to refer to themselves as Muslims (2). No government or the military leader in Pakistan ever dared to amend the anti-Ahmadi law or stop targeted attacks them. Similarly, anti-Shia sentiments are getting more widespread and visible in Pakistan. While Sunni Deobandi extremist groups like Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) or Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat (ASWJ) have spearheaded anti-Shia movement in Pakistan, there are increasing signs that even Bareilvi outfits like Tehreek-i-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) has now embraced the Deobandi antipathy for Shias as its own (3). Many Labbaik members and supporters apply the Sunni concept of takfir – in effect, excommunicating Muslims whose practices they deem improper – to Shias. At an anti-Shia demonstration in Karachi in September 2020, Abid Mubara, the Karachi chief of the Tehrik-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), had said that Sunnis could “behead people” who blasphemed against their revered personalities. (4)

Sources vary on the precise breakdown of the population between Shia and Sunni Muslims in Pakistan. Sunnis are generally believed to be 80-85 percent of the Muslim population, while Shia Muslims, including ethnic Hazara, Ismaili, and Bohra, a branch of Ismaili, are generally believed to make up 15 to 20 percent. According to Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 191,737 people identified as Ahmadi Muslim in the 2017 census. (5) However, due to Pakistan’s legal restrictions on Ahmadis identifying as Muslim, many are believed to not identify as so in the census. Pakistan’s Penal Code bans Ahmadis from “posing as Muslims,” using Islamic terms, carrying out Islamic customs, preaching or propagating their religious beliefs, proselytizing, or “insulting the religious feelings of Muslims.” (6) Moreover, the Ahmadi community members are required to declare in an affidavit that they were non-Muslims to obtain a national identification card in Pakistan. (7) The punishment for violating these provisions is imprisonment for up to three years and a fine, the amount of which is at the discretion of the sentencing judge.

As per the 2023 Human Rights Watch (HRW) report on Pakistan, discriminatory provisions that remain in Pakistan’s electoral law effectively excludes members of the Ahmadiyya community because of their religious beliefs, as Ahmadis should either renounce their faith completely or agree to be placed in a separate electoral list that categorizes them as “non-Muslim” in order to vote. (8) In October 2022, the Punjab government in Pakistan made it mandatory to include the oath of Khatm-e-Nabuwat, finality of the Prophethood, in the marriage certificate form. (9)

A March 2023 human rights report on Pakistan by the State Department of the United States of America, states that “Passport applicants must list their religious affiliation, and those wishing to be listed as Muslims must swear, they believe the Prophet Muhammad is the final prophet and denounce the founder of the Ahmadi movement as a false prophet.” (10) On December 29, 2023, the United States of America’s Secretary of State redesignated Pakistan as a “Country of Particular Concern” (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, as amended, for having engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom and announced a waiver of the sanctions that accompany designation in the national interest of the United States of America. (11)

Due to rising intolerance and fear for life, many human rights activists and minority representatives in Pakistan avoid openly defending rights of Ahmadis or other persecuted minorities.

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), in a 2023 report, said the standardized national curriculum created an “exclusionary narrative that sidelines Pakistan’s religious minorities.” Additionally, some hardline madrassahs in Pakistan openly promotes violent extremism and intolerance toward religious minorities like Hindus, Shias, Ahmadis. (13) In January 2023, the National Assembly of Pakistan unanimously passed an amendment to Pakistan’s blasphemy law through the Criminal Laws (Amendment) Act, 2023, under which any derogatory remarks against revered personalities in Islam could lead to imprisonment for at least 10 years. (14) In 2020, the government of Pakistan excluded Ahmadis from the National Minorities Commission (NMC), a governmental body to promote the rights of non-Muslim religious minorities in Pakistan. (15) During debates surrounding the question of Ahmadi inclusion in the NMC, Pakistan’s former Minister for Religious and Inter-faith Harmony Affairs, Noor-ul-Haq Qadri, publicly stated in 2020, “Whoever shows sympathy or compassion towards Ahmadis is neither loyal to Islam nor the state of Pakistan.” (16) Additionally, Pakistan’s former State Minister for Parliamentary Affairs, Ali Muhammad Khan, referred to Ahmadis as “agents of chaos.”

The Shia Hazara community has been the main target of Islamist terror groups in the country. Hazaras mostly reside in Balochistan province and are often subjected to state and non-state sponsored violence from anti-Shia outfits like LeJ, ISIS. On August 1, 2023, armed men opened fire on security personnel escorting a polio vaccination team, killing two Hazara policemen in Quetta, Balochistan. Two days later, another Hazara policeman was assassinated in Quetta. (18) According to Pakistan’s National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR), over 2,000 Hazaras have been killed in terrorist-related incidents and targeted killings between 1999 and 2023. (19) Similarly, the Shia community in Kurram, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has been facing regular attacks from Sunni Islamist outfits. In the ongoing clashes between Shia and Sunni tribes in Kurram, at least 46 people have been killed, mostly Shias, and 200 injured so far. (20)

The 2022 Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) report over 70 percent of all blasphemy cases—which carry the death penalty—in Pakistan are against Shias. (21) In March 2021, the Center for Social Justice, a minority rights organization in Pakistan, reported that at least 199 individuals were accused of blasphemy offenses in the year 2020. (22) The accused were mostly Shia (70 per cent of cases) and Ahmadi Muslims (20 per cent of cases). In the weeks leading up to and during the month of Muharram in Pakistan, authorities often restrict the movement and activities of several Shia religious heads, instilling a sense of targeted discrimination among the community members. (23) They often get subjected to numerous forms of hate speech and acts, most commonly as campaigns in mosques, schools, public spaces and increasingly on social media with hashtags pronouncing Shias as blasphemers and *wajibulqatl* (fit to be killed). (24) As religious intolerance intensifies in Pakistan, religious minorities like Ahmadis and Shias will face increased human rights violations and targeted attacks by both state and non-state actors. The deliberate inaction from the state authorities in Pakistan will only make things worse for the minority communities.

(1) <https://appgfreedomofreligionorbelief.org/media/Sulema-Ahmadi-section.pdf>

(2) <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/asa330151991en.pdf>

(3) <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/21/pakistani-shias-live-in-terror-as-sectarian-violence-increases>

(4) <https://gulfnews.com/photos/news/photos-anti-shiite-protesters-march-for-second-day-in-karachi-1.1599979580412>

(5) <https://www.pbs.gov.pk/sites/default/files/population/2017/tables/pakistan/Table09n.pdf>

(6) <https://www.hrw.org/news/2007/05/06/pakistan-pandering-extremists-fuels-persecution-ahmadis>

(7) <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1674996/nadras-court-ordered-data-sharing-worries-ahmadis>

(8) <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/pakistan>

- (9) <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2381555/punjab-mandates-declaration-on-finality-of-prophethood-in-marriage-deed>
- (10) <https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/pakistan/>
- (11) <https://www.state.gov/countries-of-particular-concern-special-watch-list-countries-entities-of-particular-concern/>
- (13) <https://www.hudson.org/national-security-defense/pakistan-s-descent-into-religious-intolerance#:~:text=As%20the%20madrasas%20minted%20more,with%20practice%20of%20minority%20faiths.>
- (14) <https://www.dawn.com/news/1769073>
- (15) <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/5/8/hrw-slams-exclusion-of-ahmadis-from-pakistan-minority-commission>
- (16) https://www.voanews.com/a/extremism-watch_pakistani-ahmadi-leaders-fear-backlash-after-new-minority-commission-formation/6189460.html
- (17) <https://apnews.com/article/pakistan-polio-vaccination-police-killed-gunmen-a66d17ecf4a22a80a8c4fca3529f06ac>
- (18) <https://thefridaytimes.com/08-Aug-2023/seven-years-after-the-quetta-blast-grief-is-still-overpowering#:~:text=On%20August%201%2C%202023%2C%20two,bomb%20blast%20in%20Kandahari%20Bazaar.>
- (19) <https://www.nchr.gov.pk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Understanding-the-Agonyes-of-Ethnic-Hazaras.pdf>
- (20) <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/8/2/kurram-clashes-how-a-pakistani-land-dispute-led-to-a-deadly-tribal-battle>
- (21) <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/country-information-report-pakistan.pdf>
- (22) <https://www.dawn.com/news/1605527>
- (23) <https://www.ucanews.com/news/shia-muslims-feel-the-heat-of-pakistans-blasphemy-laws/90509>
- (24) <https://thediplomat.com/2020/09/the-changing-landscape-of-anti-shia-politics-in-pakistan/>