

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	518
Land:	Pakistan
Kilde:	US Department of State
Titel:	2019 Report on International Religious Freedom: Pakistan
Udgivet:	10. juni 2020
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	2. juli 2020

Document #2031283

USDOS – US Department of State

2019 Report on International Religious Freedom: Pakistan

Executive Summary

The constitution establishes Islam as the state religion and requires all provisions of the law to be consistent with Islam. The constitution states, “Subject to law, public order, and morality, every citizen shall have the right to profess, practice, and propagate his religion.” It also states, “A person of the Qadiani group or the Lahori group (who call themselves Ahmadis), is a non-Muslim.” The courts continued to enforce blasphemy laws, punishment for which ranges from life in prison to execution for a range of charges, including “defiling the Prophet Muhammad.” According to civil society reports, there were at least 84 individuals imprisoned on blasphemy charges, at least 29 of whom had received death sentences, as compared with 77 and 28, respectively, in 2018. The government has never executed anyone specifically for blasphemy. According to data provided by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), police registered new blasphemy cases against at least 10 individuals. Christian advocacy organizations and media outlets stated that four Christians were tortured or mistreated by police in August and September, resulting in the death of one of them. On January 29, the Supreme Court upheld its 2018 judgment overturning the conviction of Asia Bibi, a Christian woman sentenced to death for blasphemy in 2010. Bibi left the country on May 7, after death threats made it unsafe for her to remain. On September 25, the Supreme Court overturned the conviction of a man who had spent 18 years in prison for blasphemy. On December 21, a Multan court sentenced English literature lecturer Junaid Hafeez to death for insulting the Prophet Muhammad after he had spent nearly seven years awaiting trial and verdict. NGOs continued to report lower courts often failed to adhere to basic evidentiary standards in blasphemy cases. Ahmadiyya Muslim community leaders continued to state they were affected by discriminatory and ambiguous legislation and court judgments that denied them basic rights, including a 2018 Islamabad High Court judgment that some government agencies used to deny national identification cards to Ahmadi Muslims. Throughout the year, some government officials and politicians engaged in anti-Ahmadi rhetoric and attended events that Ahmadi Muslims said incited violence against members of their community. NGOs expressed concern that authorities often failed to intervene in instances of societal violence against religious minorities due to fear of the perpetrators, inadequate staff, or apathy. Perpetrators of societal violence and abuses against religious minorities often faced no legal consequences due to a lack of follow-through by law enforcement, bribes offered by the accused, and pressure on victims to drop cases. In some cases of alleged kidnapping and forced conversions of young religious minority women,

however, government authorities intervened to protect the alleged victim and ascertain her will. On November 9, the government opened a newly refurbished Sikh holy site, the Gurdwara Darbar Sahib, along with a visa-free transit corridor for Sikh pilgrims traveling from India. Minority religious leaders stated members of their communities continued to experience discrimination in public schools and tertiary education, which resulted in very few religious minority applicants competing and qualifying for private and civil service employment.

Armed sectarian groups connected to organizations banned by the government as extremist, as well as groups designated as terrorist organizations by the United States and other governments, continued to stage attacks targeting Shia Muslims, including the predominantly Shia Hazara community. According to the South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP), however, the number of sectarian attacks and killings by armed groups decreased compared with previous years, corresponding with a continued overall decline in terrorist attacks. On April 12, a bomb attack in Quetta, Balochistan, targeting Shia Hazaras killed 21 persons, including eight Hazaras. Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), and the Islamic State (ISIS) each claimed responsibility. On May 7, terrorists affiliated with Hizbul Ahrar, a splinter group of TTP, attacked police stationed outside the Data Darbar Shrine in Lahore, the largest Sufi shrine in South Asia, killing nine and wounding 24. The government continued to implement the 2014 National Action Plan (NAP) against terrorism, including countering sectarian hate speech and extremism, as well as military and law enforcement operations against terrorist groups. Multiple civil society groups and faith community leaders stated the government had increased efforts to provide enhanced security at religious minority places of worship, which had been frequent targets of attack in past years. Police and security forces throughout the country enhanced security measures during religious holidays, and no religious festival was disrupted by violence for the second year in a row.

Throughout the year, unidentified individuals targeted and killed Shia Muslims, including ethnic Hazaras, who are largely Shia, and Ahmadi Muslims in attacks believed to be religiously motivated. The attackers' relationship to organized terrorist groups was often unclear. Human rights activists reported numerous instances of societal violence related to allegations of blasphemy; of efforts by individuals to coerce religious minorities to convert to Islam; and of societal harassment, discrimination, and threats of violence directed at members of religious minority communities. NGOs expressed concern about what they stated was an increasing frequency of attempts to kidnap, forcibly convert, and forcibly marry young women from religious minority communities, especially young Hindu and Christian women. There also continued to be reports of attacks on holy places, cemeteries, and religious symbols of Hindu, Christian, and Ahmadiyya minorities. According to Ahmadi civil society organizations, the government failed to restrict advertisements or speeches inciting anti-Ahmadi violence, despite this responsibility being a component of the NAP. Civil society groups continued to express concerns about the safety of religious minorities.

Senior Department of State officials, including the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, Special Advisor for Religious Minorities, Charge d’Affaires, Consuls General, and embassy officers met with senior advisors to the prime

minister, the minister for foreign affairs, the minister for human rights, the minister for religious affairs, and officials from these ministries to discuss blasphemy law reform; laws concerning Ahmadi Muslims; the need to better protect members of religious minority communities; sectarian relations; and religious respect. The U.S. government provided training for provincial police officers on human rights and protecting religious minorities. Embassy officers met with civil society leaders, local religious leaders, religious minority representatives, and legal experts to discuss ways to combat intolerance and promote interfaith cooperation to increase religious freedom. Visiting U.S. government officials met with minority community representatives, parliamentarians, human rights activists, and members of the federal cabinet to highlight concerns regarding the treatment of religious minority communities, the application of blasphemy laws, and other forms of discrimination on the basis of religion. The Secretary of State praised the safe departure of Asia Bibi from Pakistan in May, and the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom expressed concern about the Junaid Hafeez blasphemy verdict on December 23. The embassy released videos discussing religious freedom and respect throughout the year.

On December 18, the 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 as required in the important national interests of the United States.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 210.8 million (midyear 2019 estimate). According to the provisional results of a national census conducted in 2017, 96 percent of the population is Sunni or Shia Muslim. According to government figures, the remaining 4 percent includes Ahmadi Muslims (whom national law does not recognize as Muslim), Hindus, Christians, including Roman Catholics, Anglicans, and Protestants, among others, Parsis/Zoroastrians, Baha’is, Sikhs, Buddhists, Kalash, Kihals, and Jains.

Sources vary on the precise breakdown of the Muslim population between Sunni and Shia Muslims. Sunnis are generally believed to be 80-85 percent of the Muslim population and Shia, including Hazara, Ismaili, and Bohra (a branch of Ismaili), are generally believed to make up 15-20 percent. Unofficial estimates vary widely with regard to the size of minority religious groups. Religious community representatives estimate religious groups not identifying as Sunni, Shia, or Ahmadi Muslim constitute 3 to 5 percent of the population.

According to the 2017 provisional census results, the population is 1.6 percent Hindu, 1.59 percent Christian, 0.22 percent Ahmadi, and 0.32 percent others, to include Baha’is, Sikhs, and Parsis. Taking account of the Ahmadi boycott of the official census, however, community sources put the number of Ahmadi Muslims at approximately 500,000-600,000. Estimates of the Zikri Muslim community, located in Balochistan, range

between 500,000 and 800,000 individuals. Several minority rights advocacy groups dispute the provisional results of the 2017 census and state the numbers underrepresent their true population.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution establishes Islam as the state religion but states, “Subject to law, public order, and morality, every citizen shall have the right to profess, practice, and propagate his religion.” According to the constitution, every citizen has the right to freedom of speech, subject to “reasonable restrictions in the interest of the glory of Islam,” as stipulated in the penal code. According to the penal code, the punishments for persons convicted of blasphemy include the death penalty for “defiling the Prophet Muhammad,” life imprisonment for “defiling, damaging, or desecrating the Quran,” and up to 10 years’ imprisonment for “insulting another’s religious feelings.” Speech or action intended to incite religious hatred is punishable by up to seven years’ imprisonment. Under the 2016 Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA), the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony is responsible for reviewing internet traffic and reporting blasphemous or offensive content to the Pakistan Telecommunications Authority (PTA) for possible removal, or to the Federal Investigative Agency (FIA) for possible criminal prosecution.

The constitution defines “Muslim” as a person who “believes in the unity and oneness of Almighty Allah, in the absolute and unqualified finality of the Prophethood of Muhammad ... the last of the prophets, and does not believe in, or recognize as a prophet or religious reformer, any person who claimed or claims to be a prophet after Muhammad.” It also states that “a person belonging to the Christian, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, or Parsi community, a person of the Qadiani group or the Lahori group (who call themselves Ahmadis), or a Baha’i, and a person belonging to any of the scheduled castes” is a “non-Muslim.”

According to the constitution and the penal code, Ahmadis may not call themselves Muslims or assert they are adherents of Islam. The penal code bans them from “posing as Muslims,” using Islamic terms, or carrying out Islamic customs, preaching or propagating their religious beliefs, proselytizing, or “insulting the religious feelings of Muslims.” The punishment for violating these provisions is imprisonment for up to three years and a fine. On February 7, the government of Azad Kashmir amended its interim constitution to declare Ahmadis non-Muslim.

The penal code does not explicitly criminalize apostasy, but renouncing Islam is widely considered by clerics to be a form of blasphemy, which can carry the death penalty.

The military courts’ mandate to try civilians for terrorism, sectarian violence, and other charges expired on March 31. The government may also use the Anti-Terrorism Courts (ATCs), established as a parallel legal structure under the 1997 Anti-Terrorism Act, to try cases involving violent crimes, terrorist activities, and acts or speech deemed by the government to foment religious hatred, including blasphemy.

The constitution states no person shall be required to take part in any religious ceremony or attend religious worship relating to a religion other than the person's own.

The constitution provides for “freedom to manage religious institutions.” It states every religious denomination shall have the right to establish and maintain its own institutions. The constitution states no person shall be compelled to pay any special tax for the propagation or maintenance of a religion other than the person's own. The government collects a mandatory, automatic 2.5 percent *zakat* (tax) from Sunni Muslims who hold savings accounts in banks. It distributes the funds through a government-run charity as stipends for poor families and students, payment for medical treatment, and support to Sunni mosques and madrassahs registered with the government. Sunni Muslims who want to distribute *zakat* themselves may request an exemption, and Shia Muslims are exempted by filling out a declaration of faith form.

The constitution mandates the government take steps to enable Muslims, individually and collectively, to order their lives in accordance with the fundamental principles and basic concepts of Islam and to promote the observance of Islamic moral standards. It directs the state to endeavor to secure the proper organization of Islamic tithes, religious foundations, and places of worship.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony is responsible for organizing participation in the Hajj and other Islamic religious pilgrimages. Authorities also consult the ministry on matters such as blasphemy and Islamic education. The ministry's budget covers assistance to indigent minorities, repair of minority places of worship, establishment of minority-run small development projects, celebration of minority religious festivals, and provision of scholarships for religious minority students.

The law prohibits publishing any criticism of Islam or its prophets, or insults to others' religious beliefs. The law bans the sale of Ahmadiyya religious literature.

The provincial and federal governments have legal responsibility for certain minority religious properties abandoned during the 1947 partition of British India.

The constitution states no person attending any educational institution shall be required to attend religious instruction or take part in any religious ceremony relating to a religion other than the person's own. It also states no religious denomination shall be prevented from providing religious instruction for pupils of its denomination in an educational institution maintained by the denomination.

The constitution states the government shall make Islamic studies compulsory for all Muslim students in state-run schools. Although students of other religious groups are not legally required to study Islam, schools do not always offer parallel studies in their own religious beliefs. In some schools, however, non-Muslim students may study ethics. Parents may send children to private schools, including religious schools, at the family's expense. In Punjab, Sindh, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Provinces, private schools are also required to teach Islamic studies and the Quran to Muslim students.

By law, madrassahs are prohibited from teaching or encouraging sectarian or religious hatred or violence. *Wafaqs* (independent academic boards) register seminaries, regulate curricula, and issue degrees. The five *wafaqs* each represent major streams of Islamic thought in the country: Barelvi, Deobandi, Shia, Ahle Hadith, and the suprasectarian Jamaat-i-Islami. The *wafaqs* operate through an umbrella group, Ittehad-e-Tanzeemat-e-Madaris Pakistan, to represent their interests to the government. The government requires all madrassahs to register with the Ministry of Education in addition to registration with one of five *wafaqs*.

The constitution states, “All existing laws shall be brought into conformity with the injunctions of Islam as laid down in the Holy Quran and Sunnah [Islam’s body of traditional social and legal custom and practice].” It further states no law shall be enacted which is “repugnant” to Islam. The constitution states this requirement shall not affect the “personal laws of non-Muslim citizens” or their status as citizens. Some personal laws regulating marriage, divorce, and inheritance for minority communities date from prepartition British legislation.

The constitution establishes a Federal Shariat Court (FSC) composed of Muslim judges to examine and decide whether any law or provision is “repugnant to the injunctions of Islam.” The constitution gives the FSC the power to examine a law of its own accord or at the request of the government or a private citizen. The constitution requires the government to amend the law as directed by the court. The constitution also grants the FSC “revisional jurisdiction” (the power to review of its own accord) criminal cases in the lower courts relating to certain crimes under the Hudood Ordinance, including rape and those linked to Islamic morality, such as extramarital sex, alcohol use, and gambling. The court may suspend or increase the sentence given by a criminal court in these cases. The FSC’s review power applies whether the cases involve Muslims or non-Muslims. Non-Muslims may not appear before the FSC. If represented by a Muslim lawyer, however, non-Muslims may consult the FSC in other matters, such as questions of sharia or Islamic practice that affect them or violate their rights if they so choose. By law, decisions of the FSC may be appealed to the Supreme Court’s Shariat Appellate Bench. A full bench of the Supreme Court may grant a further appeal.

The constitution establishes a Council of Islamic Ideology to make recommendations, at the request of the parliament and provincial assemblies, as to “the ways and means of enabling and encouraging Muslims to order their lives in accordance with the principles of Islam.” The constitution further empowers the council to advise the legislative and executive branches when they choose to refer a question to the council as to whether a proposed law is or is not “repugnant to the injunctions of Islam.”

In the absence of specific language in the law authorizing civil or common law marriage, marriage certificates are signed by religious authorities and registered with the local marriage registrar. The 2016 Sindh Hindu Marriage Act and the 2017 Hindu Marriage Act (applying to all other provinces) codified legal mechanisms to formally register and prove the legitimacy of Hindu marriages. In addition to addressing a legal gap by providing documentation needed for identity registration, divorce, and inheritance, the 2017 Hindu Marriage Act allows marriages to be voided when consent “was obtained by force, coercion or by fraud.” The act allows for the termination of the marriage upon the

conversion of one party to a religion other than Hinduism. In 2018, the Sindh provincial government further enacted amendments to its 2016 legislation allowing couples to seek divorce and granting Hindu women the right to remarry six months after a divorce or a spouse's death. The 2016 Sindh Hindu Marriage Act also applies to Sikh marriages. The 2018 Punjab Sikh Anand Karaj Marriage Act allows local government officials to register marriages between a Sikh man and Sikh woman solemnized by a Sikh *Anand Karaj* marriage registrar.

Some court judgments have considered the marriage of a non-Muslim woman to a non-Muslim man dissolved if she converts to Islam, although the marriage of a non-Muslim man who converts remains recognized. Under such judgments, children born to a non-Muslim couple could be considered illegitimate and ineligible for inheritance if their mother converts to Islam. The only way to legitimize the marriage and the children would be for the husband also to convert to Islam. Under such judgments, the children of a Muslim man and a Muslim woman who both convert to another religious group could be considered illegitimate, and the government could take custody of the children. The law does not speak on any of these practices.

The constitution directs the state to “safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of minorities,” to secure the well-being of the people irrespective of creed, and to discourage sectarian prejudices. It forbids discrimination against any religious community in the taxation of religious institutions. The National Commission on Human Rights (NCHR), an independent government-funded agency that reports to parliament, is required to receive petitions, conduct investigations, and request remediation of human rights abuses. The NCHR is also mandated to monitor the government's implementation of human rights and review and propose legislation. It has quasi-judicial powers and may refer cases for prosecution, but does not have arrest authority. A 2010 constitutional amendment devolved responsibility for minorities' affairs, including religious minorities, to the provinces.

According to the constitution, there shall be no discrimination on the basis of religion in appointing individuals to government service, provided they are otherwise qualified. There is a 5 percent minimum quota for hiring religious minorities at the federal and provincial levels of government.

The constitution prohibits discriminatory admission based on religious affiliation to any governmental educational institution. According to regulations, the only factors affecting admission to government schools are students' grades and home provinces; however, students must declare their religious affiliation on application forms. This declaration is also required for private educational institutions, including universities. Students who identify themselves as Muslims must declare in writing they believe the Prophet Muhammad is the final prophet. Non-Muslims are required to have the head of their local religious communities verify their religious affiliation. There is no provision in the law for atheists.

The National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) designates religious affiliation on passports and requires religious information in national identity card and passport applications. Those wishing to be listed as Muslims must swear they believe

the Prophet Muhammad is the final prophet, and must denounce the Ahmadiyya movement's founder as a false prophet and his followers as non-Muslim. There is no option to state “no religion.” National identity cards are required for all citizens upon reaching the age of 18. Identification cards are used for voting, pension disbursement, social and financial inclusion programs, and other services.

The constitution requires the president and prime minister to be Muslims. All senior officials, including members of parliament, must swear an oath to protect the country's Islamic identity. The law requires that elected Muslim officials swear an oath affirming their belief that the Prophet Muhammed is the final prophet of Islam.

The constitution reserves seats for non-Muslim members in both the national and provincial assemblies. The 342-member National Assembly has 10 reserved seats for non-Muslims. The 104-member Senate has four reserved seats for non-Muslims, one from each province. In the provincial assemblies, there are three such reserved seats in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa; eight in Punjab; nine in Sindh; and three in Balochistan. Political parties elected by the general electorate choose the minority individuals who hold these seats; they are not elected directly by the minority constituencies they represent.

The country is party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and maintains two reservations: first, that ICCPR Article 3 regarding equal rights of men and women would be “applied as to be in conformity with Personal Law of the citizens and Qanoon-e-Shahadat Order, 1984 (Law of Evidence),” under which the in-court testimony of men in certain civil matters pertaining to contracts and financial obligations is given greater weight than that of women; and second, that ICCPR Article 25, on the equal right for citizens to take part in public service, would be subject to articles of the constitution mandating that the president and prime minister be Muslims.

Government Practices

According to civil society reports, there were at least 84 individuals imprisoned on blasphemy charges, and at least 29 under sentence of death, compared with 77 and 28, respectively, in 2018. The government has never executed anyone specifically for blasphemy. According to data provided by NGOs, authorities registered new blasphemy cases against at least 10 individuals during the year. Courts issued two new death sentences and sentenced another individual to five years' imprisonment. The Supreme Court overturned the conviction of one person for blasphemy, and a lower court acquitted another person charged with blasphemy during the year. Other blasphemy cases continued without resolution. At least one individual was accused of spreading blasphemous content through social media under PECA. Civil society groups continued to state that the blasphemy laws disproportionately affected members of religious minority communities. Of the 84 imprisoned for blasphemy, 31 were Christian, 16 Ahmadi, and 5 Hindu. According to civil society sources, as of the end of the year, 29 individuals remained on death row for alleged blasphemy. Persons accused of blasphemy were often simultaneously charged with terrorism offenses. NGOs continued to report lower courts often did not adhere to basic evidentiary standards in blasphemy cases.

Christian advocacy organizations and media outlets reported four cases of police mistreatment of and discrimination against Christians in August and September, including one case that resulted in the death of Amir Masih in September. According to multiple media reports, police in Lahore arrested Masih after he was accused of theft and held him for four days before notifying his family to pick him up. Closed-circuit television showed policemen bringing Masih out of the hospital in a wheelchair, and he died a few hours later. Media reported that a post-mortem examination found signs of torture, including burn marks and broken ribs. According to some media reports, Masih's brother said that one of the policemen made derogatory comments about Christians, including, "I know how to deal with these infidels." The Punjab Inspector General of Police removed the investigation officer and arrested five others, but there were no further reports of investigation or prosecution of the officers involved. Instances of torture and mistreatment by some police personnel were part of broader human rights concerns about police abuses against citizens of all faiths reported by local and international human rights organizations; some police agencies took steps to curb abuses by incorporating human rights curricula in training programs.

On January 29, the Supreme Court upheld its 2018 acquittal of Asia Bibi, a Christian woman sentenced to death for blasphemy in 2010. Bibi left the country on May 7; numerous sources stated that death threats from anti-blasphemy political party Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan (TLP) and others made it unsafe for her and her family to remain. On November 13, an ATC indicted TLP leader Khadim Hussein Rizvi, TLP's religious patron-in-chief Pir Afzal Qadri, and 24 others with sedition and terrorism. The formal charges came approximately one year after police took Rizvi and Qadri into custody for their roles in leading nationwide protests and calling for the assassination of public officials at the time of Bibi's acquittal. On May 15, the Lahore High Court ordered Rizvi and Qadri to be released on bail for health reasons, and they remained free at year's end.

On December 21, a Multan court sentenced English literature lecturer Junaid Hafeez to death for allegedly insulting the Prophet Muhammad after he spent nearly seven years awaiting trial and verdict. He was simultaneously sentenced to life imprisonment for defiling the Quran and 10 years' imprisonment for outraging the feelings of Muslims. Hafeez was arrested in 2013 after members of Islamist party Jamaat-e-Islami at Bahauddin Zakariya University complained of his allegedly liberal and skeptical views, and one of his first lawyers was killed in 2014 for defending him against the blasphemy charges.

On September 12, a special cybercrimes court sentenced Sajid Ali, a Muslim, to five years imprisonment for blasphemy on social media. Authorities charged Ali with posting "sacrilegious, blasphemous, and derogatory material against Hazrat Umar" (a senior companion of the Prophet Muhammad) on Facebook in 2017 under both the blasphemy law and PECA. His conviction was the first time an individual was punished for insulting the companions of the Prophet Muhammad online.

On May 27, police in Mirpurkhas, Sindh Province, arrested Hindu veterinarian Ramesh Kumar after a prayer leader from a local mosque said he had desecrated the Quran by wrapping medicines in pages of Quranic verse. As word spread, a mob burned Kumar's

clinic and attacked the police station. In addition to arresting Kumar, which media reported police said was for his own protection, local police arrested six suspects on charges of rioting and attempted murder. Police also provided security at Kumar's residence. Media reports quoted a senior district police official who described the rioters as “miscreants” who neither loved Islam nor their neighbors.

On September 15, police in Ghotki, Sindh Province, arrested Hindu teacher Notan Lal after a student accused him of blasphemy in an Islamic studies class. Local religious leaders led a mob that vandalized a Hindu temple and looted other Hindu-owned properties. Police, supported by paramilitary officers, dispersed the crowd and moved Lal to an undisclosed location for his own protection, according to a senior police official. After the riots, the Ministry of Human Rights set up an investigative committee, which included Hindu lawmakers and human rights activists of diverse faiths. The committee found the riots were premeditated, with political motivations. The committee further recommended a formal judicial inquiry as to whether the blasphemy law had been misused. At the end of the year, no action on this recommendation was reported. Some civil society members held a peace rally to express solidarity with the Hindu community.

During the year, courts overturned some blasphemy convictions upon appeal and acquitted others of their charges after the accused had spent years in prison. On September 25, the Supreme Court overturned the conviction of Wajih-ul-Hassan, a Muslim, for blasphemy against the Prophet Muhammad after he had spent 18 years in prison. The Supreme Court's judgment criticized the lower court's conviction of ul-Hassan based on lack of witnesses, weak evidence, and an extrajudicial confession. On January 15, the Kasur Sessions Court in Punjab Province acquitted Christian laborer Pervaiz Masih of blasphemy after a three-year trial.

In May the Lahore High Court upheld the death sentences of three of the five men convicted of murder in the 2014 killings of Christian couple Shahzad Masih and Shama Bibi, but it overturned the convictions of two others.

According to NGOs and media reports, individuals convicted and sentenced to death in well-publicized blasphemy cases dating as far back as 2014 – including Nadeem James; Taimoor Raza; Mubasher, Ghulam, and Ehsan Ahmed; Sawan Masih; and Shafqat Emmanuel and Shagufta Kausar – remained in prisons and continued to await action on their appeals. In all these cases, judges repeatedly delayed hearings, adjourned hearings without hearing arguments, or sent appeals to other judicial benches. Civil society and legal sources said judges were generally hesitant to decide blasphemy cases due to fear of violent retribution. The Center for Legal Aid, Assistance, and Settlement (CLAAS) stated it believed the widespread protests following the Supreme Court's 2018 overturning of Asia Bibi's conviction may have increased many judges' reluctance.

On March 28, an ATC sentenced two additional individuals to life in prison for their role in the 2017 killing of university student Mashal Khan for alleged blasphemy. The sentencing came after the primary shooter was sentenced to death and five others were sentenced to life in prison in 2018. One of the men, Arif Khan, a local government

official affiliated with the ruling Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (Pakistan Movement for Justice) (PTI) party, was seen in two videos participating in the killing of Mashal and congratulating another accused individual for committing the killing.

Authorities charged 11 Ahmadis in connection with practicing their faith during the year, according to Ahmadiyya Muslim community leaders. Among these, six Ahmadis were arrested and charged with blasphemy, although three were released. Ahmadiyya Muslim community leaders stated that due to arrests and criminal charges for offering a sacrifice at Eid al-Adha in previous years, Ahmadis carried out the ritual sacrifice in private to avoid exposure and arrest. On March 18, a judge released elderly Ahmadi bookseller Abdul Shakoor from prison after reducing his sentence to the three years he had already served. Shakoor had been convicted of propagating the Ahmadiyya faith and “inciting hatred.”

According to law enforcement reports, there was at least one instance in which the government intervened in a case of intercommunal violence. According to those reports, a Shia procession near Lahore deviated from its approved route during the commemoration of Ashura, sparking a violent response from a Sunni group. There were no deaths but multiple injuries from gunshots and thrown stones. Police called in support from Ranger forces when they could not put down the clash on their own.

Police intervened on multiple occasions to quell mob violence directed at individuals accused of blasphemy. On March 26, police in Saddar, Punjab Province, called on a district peace committee and a local cleric to help them interrupt a mob beating seven individuals accused of blasphemy. According to media reports, the attackers released the accused only following promises that police would arrest them. In these instances, police intervened to save the lives of the accused, stop violence, and mitigate damage to property, but they also arrested and charged the accused under the blasphemy law and did not always charge those responsible for the violence. In another case, however, police in Yousafabad, Punjab Province on October 28 intervened and convinced clerics to drop charges of blasphemy against a Christian sanitation worker who found a bag containing pages from the Bible and the Quran. When he brought the pages to a Muslim shopkeeper to ascertain how to best handle the pages, the shopkeeper reportedly accused him of blasphemy and took him to a mosque, where the imam called for attacks on Christian homes.

In March three assailants killed Hindu laborer Ghansam Bheel in a village near Umerkot, Sindh Province. The killing sparked protests by Hindus in many Sindh towns against alleged police apathy. According to some reports, police began an investigation only after senior government officials intervened.

More than 40 Christian men remained in Kot Lakhpat Jail in Lahore, accused of lynching two Muslim men after terrorist suicide bombers attacked two Christian churches in March 2015. An ATC indicted the men on charges of murder and terrorism in 2016, and the trial had not concluded at year’s end. Civil society sources reported that the judge and legal counsel for the families of the two men killed and the imprisoned men were seeking a way to resolve the cases through conciliation and compensation. NGO Pakistan Interfaith League (PIL) stated the move toward conciliation and compensation

was a positive development but expressed concern that the families of the imprisoned men had no way to pay because their primary income earners had been imprisoned for years.

Historically, Hindu and Sikh leaders had noted the legal uncertainty surrounding the process of registering marriages for their communities created difficulties for Hindu and Sikh women in obtaining inheritances, accessing health services, voting, obtaining a passport, and buying or selling property. Observers stated the enactment of the 2016 Sindh Hindu Marriage Act and its 2018 amendments, the 2017 Hindu Marriage Act, and the 2018 Punjab Sikh Anand Karaj Marriage Act addressed many of the problems and also codified the right to divorce. Members of the Sindh Provincial Assembly stated that the Sindh cabinet adopted regulations to implement the Sindh Hindu Marriage Act in December.

On August 14, Prime Minister Imran Khan publicly stated, “Those in Pakistan who convert people to Islam by force...are going against Islam.” On November 21, the Senate established a Parliamentary Committee to Protect Minorities from Forced Conversions. The committee included the minister of religious affairs and interfaith harmony, the minister of human rights, and several Christian and Hindu senators. Religious minorities, however, said they remained concerned that government action to address coerced conversions of religious minorities to Islam was inadequate. Minority rights activists in Sindh cited the province’s failure to enact legislation against forced conversions as an example of the government’s retreating in the face of pressure from religious parties. Sindh Assembly member Nand Kumar Goklani introduced a bill against forced conversions on April 5. The draft updated a similar bill approved by the Sindh Assembly in 2016 that the governor refused to sign, reportedly under pressure from extremist groups. On October 23, the Sindh Assembly voted against the new bill after Islamist parties and religious leaders lobbied against it.

The family of Huma Younus, a 14-year-old Christian girl, filed a case saying Abdul Jabar, a Muslim man, kidnapped her from her Karachi home, raped her, and forcibly converted her to Islam on October 10. According to the family’s lawyer, Huma’s family had not seen her since she was taken, and she did not appear at a court hearing on November 11. Sindh Province law prohibits the marriage of minors under 18 years old.

There were reported cases of government intervention and assistance from courts and law enforcement in situations of attempted kidnapping and forced conversion, although enforcement action against alleged perpetrators was rare. On May 31, a Hindu woman testified in court that men kidnapped her from Tando Bago, Sindh, took her to another village, assaulted her, and forced her to convert to Islam. Police recovered the woman within a few days of her husband’s reporting the kidnapping. The court ruled the woman should return to her family but did not order any legal action against the suspects. On September 4, Punjab police removed a 15-year-old Christian girl from a madrassah and took her to a women’s shelter in Sheikhpura after her parents filed an abduction complaint with the Punjab Ministry of Human Rights and Minority Affairs. According to civil society and media reports, the girl’s parents became alarmed when she did not come home from school and learned the school principal had taken her to a madrassah. After visiting three madrassahs, the parents found their daughter, but they

were barred from bringing her home. The girl’s principal reportedly told her she had automatically become a Muslim by reading Arabic and offered to financially compensate her parents if they would convert to Islam.

Other cases of alleged forced conversions received high-level government intervention after minority communities lobbied for assistance. On March 20, in a case that received wide media coverage, Hindu sisters Reena and Raveena Meghwar disappeared from their home in Ghotki District, Sindh. Their father and brother said they had been abducted, and that they were underage. Local police did not file a case immediately and reportedly dismissed the family’s claims. On March 21, a video of the sisters, in which they claimed they were over 18 and had converted to Islam voluntarily and married two Muslim men, spread rapidly on social media. The sisters were taken from Sindh to Punjab Province to marry at the office of Sunni Tehreek, a religious political party. On March 24, Prime Minister Khan ordered authorities in Sindh and Punjab to investigate, and on March 25, police arrested 12 individuals, including the marriage officiant and witnesses. Also on March 25, the sisters filed a petition in the Islamabad High Court seeking protection from their family. The court ordered the government to provide protection for the women and formed a commission to investigate the case. The commission included the minister for human rights, the chair of Human Rights Commission Pakistan, the chair of the National Commission on the Status of Women, and a prominent Muslim cleric, but no minority religious members. On April 11, the court ruled that the sisters were of marriageable age and had not been forced to convert to Islam. There was no clear-cut evidence as to the age of the sisters at the time of marriage and whether they had willingly converted and gone to Punjab to marry, but in the aftermath of the incident, Hindu and Christian members of the National Assembly proposed bills to enhance punishment for those involved in forced conversions and to make child marriage a criminal offense.

On August 28, a community dispute arose when a 19-year-old Sikh woman married a Muslim man in Nankana Sahib, Punjab. According to media reports, Jagjit Kaur, a Sikh and the daughter of a prominent Sikh religious leader, converted to Islam to marry for love, but her family accused the Muslim family of kidnapping and forcibly converting her. Kaur’s family filed charges and threatened to immolate themselves if police did not bring her home. Kaur stated in court that she was of legal age to marry and converted of her own free will, and a judge ordered her to remain in a women’s shelter while the Punjab government met with representatives of each side. On September 3, Punjab Governor Chaudhry Mohammad Sarwar met with representatives of each family and stated the situation had been amicably resolved, although Sikh sources stated Kaur remained in the women’s shelter at year’s end. Media reports quoted Sarwar as stating he would not negotiate a resolution in any case he suspected to be kidnapping and forced conversion, which, he said, were unacceptable and should not be tolerated.

The Ministry of Interior maintained multi-tier schedules of religiously oriented groups it judged to be extremist or terrorist that were either banned or had their activities monitored and curtailed (Schedule 1) and individuals whose activities in the public sphere could also be curtailed, including during religious holidays such as Ashura (Schedule 4). On March 5, the government added UN-listed Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD, a political front of the terrorist organization Lashkar-e-Tayyiba) and its charity wing Falah-

i-Insaniyat Foundation (FIF) to the list of organizations proscribed under Schedule 1. On May 10, the government added seven JuD and two FIF affiliate organizations to the Schedule 1 list. Punjab police arrested JuD founder Hafiz Saeed July 17 on terrorism finance charges, and at year’s end he faced three separate terrorism-finance-related prosecutions. Other groups, including LeJ, Sipah-i-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP), and Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM), remained on Schedule 1, but groups that sources stated were widely believed to be affiliated with them continued to operate to various degrees.

According to the Ahmadiyya community spokesperson, on October 25 Assistant Commissioner of Hasilpur, Punjab, Mohammad Tayyab, led a group of police officers and other officials, who tore down part of an Ahmadi mosque. Throughout the year, police closed down two Ahmadi prayer centers in Rawalpindi, citing law and order concerns, and another prayer center in Lahore. In June police in Sheikhpura District, Punjab Province, denied Ahmadis access to a mosque they used for prayer and forced them to sign a declaration they would no longer pray in the mosque. In September police also prevented Ahmadis from praying in a private home in Gujranwala, Punjab Province, and in a newly-built prayer center in Nankana, also in Punjab. In all these cases, Ahmadiyya Muslim community leaders cited complaints from Muslim clerics as prompting police to prevent their worship. Civil society members also reported authorities took no action to prevent attacks on Ahmadi mosques or punish assailants who demolished, damaged, forcibly occupied, or set on fire Ahmadi mosques. Local authorities did not allow the repair or unsealing of Ahmadi mosques damaged or demolished by rioters in previous years.

According to Ahmadiyya community leaders, authorities continued to target and harass Ahmadi Muslims for blasphemy, violations of “anti-Ahmadi laws,” and other crimes. Ahmadiyya leaders stated the ambiguous wording of the legal provision forbidding Ahmadis from directly or indirectly identifying themselves as Muslims enabled officials to bring charges against members of the community for using the standard Islamic greeting or for naming their children Muhammad. On March 28, the Lahore High Court directed the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) and the PTA to remove or block proscribed religious material and “inauthentic” e-copies of the Quran available in app stores and other online sources; a petitioner complained to courts that Ahmadi groups had posted Ahmadi publications of the Quran online.

While the law required a senior police official to investigate any blasphemy charge before a complaint could be filed, a requirement that NGOs and legal observers stated would help contribute to an objective investigation and the dismissal of many blasphemy cases, some NGOs said police did not uniformly follow this procedure. There were some cases in which police received custody of the accused from a court for 14 days in order for a senior officer to carry out an investigation. At the same time, NGOs reported that sometimes lower-ranking police would file charges of blasphemy, rather than a senior police superintendent who had more authority to dismiss baseless claims, or that police would not carry out a thorough investigation. NGOs and legal observers also stated police often did not file charges against individuals who made false blasphemy accusations.

According to religious organizations and human rights groups, while the majority of those accused and convicted of blasphemy were Muslim, religious minorities continued to be disproportionately accused of blasphemy relative to their small percentage of the population. According to data compiled from multiple sources, since 2001 there were 28 convictions of non-Ahmadi Muslims, 16 convictions of Christians, and four convictions of Ahmadi Muslims.

Community leaders continued to report the government hindered Ahmadi from obtaining legal documents and pressured community members to deny their beliefs by requiring individuals wishing to be listed as Muslim on identity cards and passports to swear the Prophet Muhammad was the final prophet of Islam and the Ahmadiyya movement's founder was a false prophet. Ahmadiyya community representatives reported the word “Ahmadi” was written on their passports if they identified themselves as such. In 2018 the Islamabad High Court (IHC) issued a judgment requiring citizens to declare an affidavit of faith to join the army, judiciary, and civil services and directed parliament to amend laws to ensure Ahmadi did not use “Islamic” terms or have names associated with Islam. Neither the National Assembly nor the Senate had acted on the 2018 judgment by year's end, but Ahmadiyya community representatives said that NADRA required Ahmadi to declare in an affidavit that they are non-Muslims to obtain a national identification card, another requirement of the IHC judgment. According to Ahmadiyya leaders, the government effectively disenfranchised their community by requiring voters to swear an oath affirming the “finality of prophethood,” something which they stated was against Ahmadi belief, in order to register as Muslims. Since voters who registered as Ahmadi were kept on a separate voter list, they said they were more exposed to threats and physical intimidation, and many Ahmadi continued their longstanding practice of boycotting elections.

Although the Sindh Hindu Marriage Act covers registration of Sikh marriages, members of the Sikh community reportedly continued to seek a separate Sikh law so as not to be considered part of the Hindu religion.

Ahmadiyya Muslim community representatives stated Ahmadi families were unable to register their marriages with local administrative bodies, known as union councils, as those councils considered Ahmadi to be outside the authority of the Muslim Family Law of 1961. Some community representatives said Christians faced difficulties in registering marriages with Islamabad union councils because the councils claimed they had no authority to deal with unions recorded by Christian marriage registrars – usually church authorities. Parliament, church leaders, and advocates debated the text of a new draft law to govern Christian marriages nationwide, as the existing regulation dated from 1872. Members of the National Assembly and officials of the Ministry of Human Rights and the Ministry of Law and Justice held consultations with church leaders from prominent Christian denominations and with NGO representatives, but there was no agreement among different church denominations and between church leaders and NGO representatives on elements of the text pertaining to divorce and interfaith marriage at year's end. NGOs lobbying for amendments to permit divorce in a wider range of circumstances praised the Ministry of Human Rights' efforts to consult with stakeholders and overall efforts to accelerate progress on the bill.

The government continued to fund and facilitate Hajj travel for most Muslims, but Ahmadis were unable to participate in the Hajj, community leaders said, because of passport application requirements to list religious affiliation and denounce the founder of the Ahmadiyya community.

The government continued to prohibit citizens, regardless of religious affiliation, from traveling to Israel. Representatives of the Baha'i community said this policy particularly affected them because the Baha'i World Center – the spiritual and administrative center of the community – was located in Haifa, Israel. Christian advocates also called on the government to allow them to travel to Israel. In January the federal government allowed Jewish citizen Fishel Benkhald to travel to Israel after he appealed to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for special permission.

According to media reports and law enforcement sources, in the weeks leading up to and during the Islamic month of Muharram – religiously significant for Shia Muslims – authorities at the federal and provincial levels again restricted the movement and activities of dozens of clerics on the Ministry of Interior's Schedule 4 listing. According to civil society and media reports, the government restricted the movement and activities of these individuals because they were known for exacerbating sectarian tensions.

Some religious minority leaders stated the system of selecting minority parliamentarians through the internal deliberations of mainstream parties resulted in the appointment of party stalwarts or those who could afford to “buy the seats,” rather than legislators who genuinely represented minority communities. Others said parliamentarians occupying reserved seats had little influence in their parties and in the National Assembly because they did not have a voting constituency.

The requirement that Muslim elected officials swear an oath affirming their belief that the Prophet Muhammed is the final prophet of Islam continued to discourage Ahmadi Muslims from seeking public office. To seek office, Ahmadis would be forced to do so as non-Muslims, even though they self-identify as Muslim.

The government continued to permit limited non-Muslim foreign missionary activity and to allow missionaries to proselytize as long as they did not preach against Islam and they acknowledged they were not Muslim. According to the government's immigration website, the Ministry of Interior may grant visas to foreign missionaries invited by organizations registered in the country. The visas are valid for one year and allow one re-entry into the country per year, although it was understood by missionary sources that only “replacement” visas for those taking the place of departing missionaries were available for long-term missionaries seeking to enter the country for the first time. The website further stated extensions could be granted for two years with two re-entries per year, excluding from India. Approximately 50 missionaries affiliated with one Christian organization, some of whom had been working in the country for many years, were denied visa renewals after a long appeal period.

In 2018 the Federal Cabinet approved a bill with amendments to PECA to bring online blasphemy and pornographic material within its ambit. Further proposed amendments include life imprisonment for “desecrating the Quran through information systems” and the death sentence for blasphemy against the Prophet Muhammad. The bill remained in legislative process at year’s end.

The government continued its warnings against blasphemy and other illegal content on social media through periodic print advertisements and text messages sent by the PTA. The text messages stated, “Sharing of blasphemy, pornography, terrorism, and other unlawful content on social media and the internet is illegal. Users are advised to report such content on content-complaint@pta.gov.pk for action under PECA 16.”

In July PTA Chairman Amir Bajwa told the Senate that the government should either increase the PTA’s technical capabilities or block social media websites to stop the sharing of blasphemous content, which he said he believed mostly came from other countries. Bajwa also recommended the government sign mutual legal assistance treaties with other countries so that access to what the government considered blasphemous content on international social media platforms could be blocked in the country. Bajwa further stated the PTA had received 8,500 complaints regarding blasphemous internet content and had blocked approximately 40,000 websites for containing blasphemous material since 2010. Human rights activists and journalists expressed concern the government could use this initiative as a pretext to suppress views on the internet that differed from those of the government, including on religious issues.

According to representatives of some minority religious groups, the government continued to allow most organized religious groups to establish places of worship and train members of the clergy. Some Sikh and Hindu places of worship also reopened during the year. On July 29, the Evacuee Trust Property Board reopened the thousand-year-old Teja Singh Temple near Sialkot, Punjab Province that had been closed since 1947. The government further promised to restore and reopen more Hindu temples each year. On November 9, the government opened a newly refurbished Sikh holy site, the Gurdwara Darbar Sahib, built where the founder of Sikhism Guru Nanak is said to have died, along with a visa-free transit corridor (the Kartarpur Corridor) for Sikh pilgrims traveling from India. Before the refurbishing of the site and the opening of the visa-free transit corridor, the gurdwara had fallen into disrepair, and Indian Sikhs were unable to visit. Prime Minister Khan welcomed Sikh pilgrims at the site’s inauguration and gave a speech celebrating Guru Nanak and religious tolerance.

Although there continued to be no official restriction on the construction of Ahmadiyya places of worship, according to Ahmadiyya Muslim community leaders, local authorities regularly denied requisite construction permits, and Ahmadis remained forbidden to call them mosques.

Legal experts and NGOs continued to state that the full legal framework for minority rights remained unclear. While the Ministry of Law and Justice was officially responsible for ensuring the legal rights of all citizens, in practice the Ministry for Human Rights continued to assume primary responsibility for the protection of the rights of religious

minorities. The NCHR was also mandated to conduct investigations of allegations of human rights abuses, but legal sources said the commission had little power to enforce its requests. The NCHR remained without a new mandate for a second four-year term and without new commissioners at year's end.

Members of religious minority communities said there continued to be an inconsistent application of laws safeguarding minority rights and enforcement of protections of religious minorities at both the federal and provincial levels by the federal Ministry of Law and Justice, as well as by the federal Ministry of Human Rights and its provincial counterparts. They also stated the government was inconsistent in safeguarding against societal discrimination and neglect, and that official discrimination against Christians, Hindus, Sikhs, and Ahmadi Muslims persisted to varying degrees, with Ahmadi Muslims experiencing the worst treatment.

On August 8, representatives of Muslim, Hindu, Christian, Sikh, and Baha'i communities submitted a resolution to the prime minister requesting additional protection for religious minorities and women. The resolution called for the minimum age of marriage for women to be raised from 16 to 18 nationwide, the establishment of a federal ministry for religious minorities, a 5 percent quota for national and international educational scholarships for minorities, protection of minorities' houses of worship from government seizure, and provision of spaces for worship for minority communities in state institutions. Additional requests included legislation to prevent discrimination against minorities, elimination of derogatory curriculum material, government subsidies for security at minorities' schools, and legislation to address abductions, sexual violence, and forced conversions of women from religious minority communities. Finally, the resolution requested that minorities “be given particular protection” from the abuse of blasphemy laws.

In some cases, senior government officials condemned instances of discrimination by government officials. In March the ruling PTI party forced Punjab Provincial Minister for Information and Culture Fayyazul Hassan Chohan to resign after he made derogatory remarks against Hindus, and multiple cabinet ministers and senior advisors condemned Chohan's speech. Chohan later received a new cabinet appointment as provincial minister for colonies in July and was reappointed as provincial minister for information and culture in December.

Legal observers continued to raise concerns regarding the failure of lower courts to adhere to basic evidentiary standards in blasphemy cases, which led to some convicted persons spending years in prison before higher courts overturned their convictions and freed them for lack of evidence. According to legal advocacy groups, some lower courts continued to conduct proceedings in an intimidating atmosphere, with members of antiblasphemy groups such as the TLP often threatening the defendant's attorneys, family members, and supporters. At other times, they reported, blasphemy trials were held inside the jail for security reasons, in which case the hearings were not public, resulting in a gain in immediate security but a loss of transparency. These observers said the general refusal of lower courts to hold timely hearings or acquit those accused

persisted due to fear of reprisal and vigilantism. Legal observers also reported judges and magistrates often delayed or continued trials indefinitely to avoid confrontation with, or violence from, groups provoking protests.

Government officials and politicians attended and spoke at multiple *Khatm-e-Nabuwat* (Finality of Prophethood) conferences held in major cities and at religious sites around the country. These conferences were organized by groups saying they were defending the teaching that the Prophet Muhammad is the last prophet but were often characterized by hate speech against Ahmadi Muslims. On January 6, Special Assistant to the Prime Minister Syed Zulfiqar Bukhari spoke at a *Khatm-e-Nabuwat* conference hosted by the Golra Sharif Shrine in Islamabad. According to media reports, Bukhari said that Pakistan would be the first to counter any propaganda against the finality of prophethood and that anyone working against the theological conviction “is not a human.” Bukhari later denied making anti-Ahmadi statements and tweeted on March 26, “Pakistan belongs to ALL Pakistanis.” On August 6, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Information Minister Shaukat Yousafzai spoke at a *Khatm-e-Nabuwat* conference in Peshawar.

Minority religious leaders stated members of their communities continued to experience discrimination in admission to colleges and universities. Ahmadi representatives said the wording of the declaration students were required to sign on their applications for admission to universities continued to prevent Ahmadis from declaring themselves as Muslims. Their refusal to sign the statement meant they were automatically disqualified from fulfilling the admissions requirements. The government said Ahmadis could qualify for admission as long as they did not claim to be Muslims.

Members of religious minority communities stated public schools gave Muslim students bonus grade points for memorizing the Quran, but there were no analogous opportunities for extra academic credit available for religious minority students.

Most minority religious groups said they continued to face discrimination in government hiring, but there were exceptions. In September Pushpa Kumari became the country’s first female Hindu assistant subinspector of police. While there remained a 5 percent quota for hiring religious minorities at the federal level, minority organizations said government employers did not enforce it. On October 15, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government notified the Supreme Court it had raised its quota for hiring religious minorities from 3 to 5 percent, bringing it to the 5 percent quota already required by the Punjab, Sindh, and Balochistan Provincial governments. According to religious minority activists, however, provincial governments also often failed to meet such quotas for hiring religious minorities into the civil service.

Minority rights activists said most government employment advertisements for janitorial staff still listed being non-Muslim as a requirement. Minority rights activists criticized these advertisements as discriminatory and insulting. In June civil rights activists from many faiths raised concerns over a Pakistan Army advertisement specifying only Christians could apply for the job of sanitation worker in the army’s Mujahid Force. On June 28, the director-general of the military’s Inter-Services Public Relations Agency responded that the advertisement had been reposted with no discriminatory qualifications.

Representatives of religious minorities said a “glass ceiling” continued to prevent their promotion to senior government positions, but one NGO also stated that due to insufficient higher education opportunities, few religious minorities met the qualifications to apply for these positions. Although there were no official obstacles to the advancement of minority religious group members in the military, they said in practice, non-Muslims rarely rose above the rank of colonel and were not assigned to senior positions.

The Ministry of Human Rights and the Ministry of Education held consultations with minority faith representatives during the year in a review of textbooks for derogatory material. Officials of the Ministry of Human Rights stated in August that after their review and further reviews from the provincial governments of Punjab, Sindh, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, “All hate speech had been removed” from school textbooks in these provinces. The Ministry of Human Rights reported the Ministry of Education adopted all its recommendations to remove hate speech, but its recommendations to include new rights-based content were not accepted. Some minority faith representatives said their inclusion in the review process was minimal, however, and stated they feared problematic content would remain in curricula. In a March peace conference, Punjab Minister for Human Rights and Minority Affairs Ejaz Alam Augustine stated that Christian representatives would sit on the Punjab Textbook Board during the preparation of curriculum to ensure derogatory statements were removed, but the promise was reportedly not fulfilled at year’s end. Ahmadiyya community representatives said local associations of clerics frequently distributed anti-Ahmadi stickers to school districts to place on textbooks, and the school boards usually accepted them. These stickers contained phrases such as, “It is strictly prohibited in Sharia to speak to or do any business with Qadianis,” “The first sign of love of the Prophet is total boycott of Qadianis,” and “If your teacher is a Qadiani, refuse learning from him.”

While schools were required to teach Islamic studies and the Quran to Muslim students, sources reported many non-Muslim students were also required to participate because their schools did not offer parallel courses in their own religious beliefs or ethics. The government did not permit Ahmadis to teach Islamic studies in public schools.

Prime Minister Khan, Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi, and Minister for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony Noor-ul-Haq Qadri all spoke on peace and interfaith harmony at the November 9 opening of the Kartarpur Corridor to the Sikh Gurdwara Darbar Sahib worship complex. Qadri and several PTI Members of the National Assembly spoke of the government’s commitment to stop kidnappings and forced conversions at a ministry-hosted event celebrating the Hindu festival of Holi. Member of the National Assembly Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari celebrated the Hindu festival of Diwali at a Sikh Gurdwara.

From September 1-10, leading to and during the Shia commemoration of Ashura, the ninth and tenth days of Muharram, the government emphasized unity among Muslims around the Ashura holiday. Prime Minister Khan, President Arif Alvi, and Foreign Minister Qureshi used the Ashura story to exhort Muslims to be ready to lay down their lives for the cause of good against evil. Law enforcement again deployed extra security

around Shia processions in major cities throughout Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Balochistan Provinces, including for Hazara Shia communities in Quetta. According to civil society sources, authorities again restricted the movement and public sermons of both Sunni and Shia clerics accused of provoking sectarian violence. The government placed some clerics on Schedule 4, a list of proscribed persons based on reasonable suspicion of terrorism or sectarian violence, and temporarily detained others under the Maintenance of Public Order Act.

Authorities also provided enhanced security for Christian and Hindu places of worship at various times throughout the year. After an attack on a mosque in New Zealand that killed 51 on March 15, the government increased security at churches throughout the country, which Christian community members stated was out of concern for potential retaliation against Christians. Sindh Minorities' Affairs Minister Hari Ram Kishori Lal announced on November 18 the provincial government would provide CCTV cameras to enhance security at 243 religious minority houses of worship in Sindh. Several activists and Christian pastors reported improved security at places of worship, notably in Lahore, Peshawar, and Quetta during the major holidays of Holi, Ashura, and Christmas.

The Sindh provincial government declared Diwali a public holiday for Hindu government employees.

There were continued reports that some madrassahs taught violent extremist doctrine, which the government sought to curb through madrassah registration and curriculum reform. On September 3, the federal government approved the Ministry of Education's assumption of administrative control and registration authority of the country's estimated 30,000 madrassahs. Prime Minister Khan, Education Minister Shafqat Mahmood, and Chief of Army Staff General Javed Bajwa stated the goal of madrassah registration and curriculum reform was to bring madrassah students into the mainstream, create a uniform education policy, and improve madrassah graduates' economic prospects. Government officials reported ongoing consultations with leaders of the five *wafaqs* throughout the year and stated the Ministry of Education would open 12 regional offices throughout the country to assist with the registration process.

On November 5, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated the country was committed to taking concrete actions against terrorism under the NAP. The ministry further stated the country had taken “extensive legal and administrative measures” to implement its obligations under UN Security Council Resolution 1267 to freeze assets and deny funds to all UN-designated entities and individuals. The National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA) continued to operate its “Surfsafe” app, launched in 2018, to help citizens report websites that published extremist content and hate speech.

Print and broadcast media outlets continued to occasionally publish and broadcast anti-Ahmadi rhetoric. On November 9, PTI politician and former minister for science and technology Azam Swati said in a live talk show broadcast that he and PM Khan both “sent curses” upon Ahmadis, responding to Islamist politicians' accusations that PM Khan was sympathetic to the Ahmadiyya community. Ministry of Human Rights officials stated the government ordered PEMRA to monitor television broadcasts and take action against any broadcaster airing hate speech against Ahmadis. Ahmadiyya Muslim

community representatives stated that the Urdu-language press frequently printed hate speech in news stories and op-eds, estimating nearly 3,000 instances of hate speech were printed during the year, some of which could be considered inciting anti-Ahmadi violence. Inflammatory anti-Ahmadi rhetoric continued to exist on social media.

Civil society groups said the government made some progress in implementing a 2014 Supreme Court decision ordering the government to take several steps to ensure the rights of minorities and promote a culture of religious and social tolerance, including establishing a Supreme Court mechanism to hear complaints, a task force to protect religious minority places of worship, and a national commission for minority rights. On October 3, the Supreme Court established a special judicial panel made up of Supreme Court justices to hear petitions related to the rights of minorities and appointed a commissioner to oversee the court’s own implementation of the judgment. According to officials from the Ministry of Human Rights, the Ministry of Interior established a task force convening cabinet ministries, police branches, Inter-Services Intelligence Agency, and religious representatives to discuss implementation of the judgment. As chair of the task force, the Ministry of Human Rights stated it had given 10 priority action points to the ministries involved. The government did not establish a special task force to protect minority places of worship, as was called for by the judgment. Many faith community members, however, said they believed the government did increase efforts to protect places of worship. Human rights activists continued to state that neither the federal nor most provincial governments had made substantial progress in implementing other aspects of the 2014 decision. According to several human rights activists, the most notable area of inaction was the continued failure to establish an empowered National Commission for Minorities. Officials of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony and the Ministry of Human Rights stated they were committed to establishing such a commission as directed by the Supreme Court. Some civil society groups attributed lack of progress to a belief within the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony that such a commission was not necessary due to the existence of its own interfaith harmony commission.

Community leaders continued to state the government did not take adequate action to protect its poorest citizens, including religious minorities, from bonded labor practices. Only eight of Sindh’s 29 districts have established District Vigilance Committees, which are legally mandated to monitor and eradicate bonded labor practices. Of the eight established District Vigilance Committees, only three are fulfilling their legal mandate. In some districts of Sindh Province, members of Hindu scheduled castes were disproportionately affected by bonded labor practices in agriculture and brick kiln industries, according to human rights activists. On December 19, the Sindh Provincial Assembly passed the Sindh Women Agriculture Act to strengthen protections for female agricultural workers, including the right to a written contract and collective bargaining, but implementing regulations were not drafted by year’s end. The Sindh Province government also did not pass regulations to implement the Bonded Labor Abolition Act of 2015, which would enhance the monitoring and eradication of bonded labor practices.

Abuses by Foreign Forces and Nonstate Actors

According to civil society and media, violence and abuses continued to be committed by armed sectarian groups connected to organizations banned by the government, including LeJ, Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), and SSP, as well as abuses by individuals and groups, such as ISIS, designated as terrorist organizations by the United States and other governments. These groups continued to stage attacks targeting Shia Muslims, particularly the predominantly Shia Hazara community. In a change from previous years, there were no reports of Christians being targeted by armed sectarian groups during the year. According to the SATP, the number of sectarian attacks by armed groups continued to decrease, corresponding with an overall decline in terrorist attacks. Data on sectarian attacks varied because no standardized definition existed of what constituted a sectarian attack among reporting organizations. According to the SATP, at least 27 persons were killed and 68 injured in four incidents of sectarian violence by extremist groups during the year. All of these attacks targeted gatherings of Shia individuals.

On April 12, a bomb attack in Quetta targeting Shia Hazaras going to a vegetable market under police protection killed 21 persons, including eight Hazaras, and injured at least 48. TTP, LeJ, and the ISIS each claimed responsibility for the attack, which the SATP and other analysts attributed to LeJ with ISIS support. The attack sparked four days of sit-in protests by Hazaras in Quetta, who demanded the government end terrorist attacks on their community. President Arif Alvi met with families of the victims on April 16, Minister of State for Interior Shehryar Afridi and Balochistan Chief Minister Jam Kamal Alyani met with protesters on April 17, and Prime Minister Khan visited Quetta on April 21. On May 7, terrorists affiliated with Hizbul Ahrar, a splinter group of TTP, attacked police stationed outside the Data Darbar Shrine in Lahore, the largest Sufi shrine in South Asia, killing nine and wounding 24. In late May police stopped an attempted terrorist attack at a Shia place of worship in Quetta. A 16-year-old boy dressed as a woman tried to enter the building and as police intercepted him, he threw a hand grenade, which killed him. On June 7, unidentified assailants detonated magnetically attached improvised explosive devices (IEDs) on two vehicles carrying Shia passengers near Ziarat, Balochistan Province. The first IED targeted a family of Bohra Shia Muslims returning from a shrine, killing three, and the second IED targeted a group of Shia Hazaras, killing two and injuring seven. No group claimed responsibility, but the Counter Terrorism Department investigated the bombings as terrorist attacks.

There were multiple reports of targeted killings of Shia in Dera Ismail Khan and other parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, although because religion and ethnicity were often closely related, it was difficult to categorize some incidents as being solely based on religious identity.

According to the SATP and media reports, ATCs convicted and sentenced several individuals affiliated with terrorist organizations and involved in past sectarian attacks and targeted killings. On February 20, police arrested LeJ members Furqan Bungalzai and Ali Akbar on charges of involvement in the February 16, 2017 Sehwan Shrine attack, which killed 82 and injured 383, and for targeted killings of Shia Hazaras and Christians in Balochistan. On May 6, Karachi police arrested five individuals affiliated with banned

Shia organization Sipah-e-Muhammad Pakistan on charges of involvement in targeted sectarian killings of Sunni Muslims in Karachi. On May 23, a Karachi ATC convicted and sentenced two LeJ militants to death for killing Shia lawyer Zain-ul-Abideen.”

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Societal abuses of religious freedom included targeted killings of Shia and Ahmadi Muslims and violence and discrimination against Christians, Hindus, and Ahmadi Muslims. Throughout the year, unidentified individuals assaulted and killed Shia, including predominantly Shia Hazaras, and Ahmadis in attacks sources believed to be religiously motivated. The attackers’ relationship to organized terrorist groups was often unclear.

Shia Hazaras in Quetta, Balochistan Province, continued to express concern about targeted killings taking place for the last several years. Although the government increased security measures around Hazara neighborhoods in Quetta, some Hazara community members continued to state that these measures had turned their neighborhoods into isolated ghettos.

On October 8, unknown assailants shot and killed Hindu trader Ashok Kumar in Hub, Balochistan Province, outside a hotel. The local trader community protested by blocking a road and burning tires. The motive of the assailants was unknown, and no arrests were reported.

According to Ahmadiyya community representatives, three incidents of what appeared to be targeted killings of Ahmadiyya community members by unknown individuals took place. On January 3, in Mandi Bahauddin District, Punjab, Ahmadi Mahdi Khan was shot and killed by unknown assailants. According to community representatives, his family was the only Ahmadi family in their village, and Khan had received threats from TLP members before the killing. His family relocated after the killing out of fear of further violence. On March 14, two Ahmadi men were killed in Koh Fateh Jang in what the Ahmadi community said it believed was a targeted killing, but other sources said may have been a land dispute.

There were no reports of individuals killed for apostasy, but members of civil society reported that converts from Islam lived in varying degrees of secrecy for fear of violent retribution from family members or society at large.

Civil society activists and media reported young Christian and Hindu women being abducted and raped by Muslim men. Victims said their attackers singled them out as vulnerable due to their religious minority identity. On June 7, a 12-year-old Hindu girl in Hyderabad, Sindh was found unconscious after being raped. Police later arrested two suspects. On September 16, 25-year-old Hindu dental college student Nimrita Chandani was found dead in her college hostel room in Larkana, Sindh Province, in what her friends and family said was a murder staged as suicide. The school administration originally stated the death was a suicide, but an ensuing postmortem exam showed evidence of rape and strangulation. The Sindh High Court ordered a judicial inquiry on

September 18 and, according to media reports, detained 32 individuals for questioning, but there were no charges at year's end. CLAAS reported numerous cases of rapes of Christian women, including 17-year-old Sara Aslam from Sheikhpura, who was allegedly abducted and raped by Muslim man Ali Raza on May 15. According to CLAAS, police did not arrest the suspect until several Christians drew attention to the case. According to CLAAS and the PCLJ, although the victims filed reports with local police, they were treated similarly to most rape cases, in which the cases rarely went to trial or received a verdict due to threats from the accused party's family, lack of witnesses, or lack of interest from police.

According to CLAAS and PCLJ, there were also reports of religious minority women being physically attacked after spurning a man's advances, including Saima Sardar, who was reportedly shot and killed on July 10 in Faisalabad by Muhammad Waseem after she refused to convert to Islam and marry him.

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), a national NGO, said forced conversions of young women of minority faiths, often lower caste Hindu girls from rural Sindh, continued to occur. In an April report, HRCP said 1000 cases of forced conversions of Christian and Hindu women were reported in 2018 in Sindh alone. The group reported Hindu girls were being kidnapped, forcibly converted to Islam, and married to Muslim men. According to HRCP's interviews, Hindu community leaders said they believed girls were held against their will for several days, sometimes raped, and coerced into giving a conversion testimony. Some community representatives stated influential Muslim clerics, including the custodian of the Bharchundi Sharif Mian Mithoo Shrine, were driving a conversion campaign that took advantage of poverty, low education, and a desire to escape low social status. The HRCP report further stated that influential local business and political leaders turned a blind eye to forced conversions due to their business interests with newly established madrassas along growing trade routes.

Christian activists also stated young women from their communities were vulnerable to forced conversions. CLAAS reported at least 15 young Christian women were kidnapped and forcibly converted during the year. Of these cases, three women were returned to their families by orders of the court. For example, on February 6, a 14-year-old Christian girl named Sadaf Khan was kidnapped in Bahawalpur, Punjab Province, and forcibly married and converted. According to minority rights activists, a Muslim man named Mubashir harassed her as she went to and from school, and after she withdrew from school because of his intimidation, he kidnapped her. Christian activists reported that this case and others affected entire communities, because many young women withdrew from school as a result. As of the end of the year, no charges had been filed and Khan was believed to still be held by her abductor.

International and Pakistani media, as well as Christian activists, reported that young Christian women, many of them minors, were specifically targeted by Chinese human traffickers because of their poverty and vulnerability. The traffickers told pastors and parents they would arrange marriages to Chinese men who had supposedly converted to Christianity, after which the women were taken to China, abused, and in some cases, sexually trafficked. Reports indicated parents and pastors were frequently paid by the

traffickers for the women, and that some pastors were complicit in the trafficking. In May the FIA arrested eight Chinese nationals and four Pakistanis in Punjab Province in connection with the trafficking. In September FIA investigators sent a report detailing cases against 52 Chinese citizens and 20 Pakistani associates in Punjab and Islamabad to Prime Minister Khan, according to the Associated Press. In October a court in Faisalabad, Punjab acquitted 31 of the accused Chinese citizens after several women interviewed by police refused to testify. According to human rights activists and officials cited in media reports, the government pressured the FIA to end its investigation out of concern for damaging the country's relationship with China.

Kalash representatives in Khyber-Paktunkha Province continued to report their youth were under pressure from Muslim school teachers and others to convert from their traditional beliefs.

On March 20, Khatib Hussain, a student at Bahawalpur Government Sadiq Egerton College, stated he killed head of the English department Khalid Hameed for “speaking against Islam.” When asked in an interview after the killing why he did not oppose his professor with lawful methods, the student stated the country's laws were “freeing the blasphemers.” Police arrested Hameed, but as of year's end had not brought charges against him. Media reported that a preacher associated with TLP and suspected of inciting the killing was not charged and was released on bail.

Throughout the year, Islamic organizations with varying degrees of political affiliation held conferences and rallies to support the doctrine of *Khatm-e-Nabuwat*. The events were often covered by English and vernacular media and featured anti-Ahmadiyya rhetoric, including language that could incite violence against Ahmadis.

Ahmadis continued to report widespread societal harassment and discrimination against community members, including physical attacks on Ahmadi individuals, destruction of homes and personal property, and threats intended to force Ahmadis to abandon their jobs or towns. On March 14, an Ahmadi wedding was disrupted in Mirpurkhas, Sindh Province, when Muslim clerics forced the wedding hall owner to evict the wedding party in the middle of the ceremony. In Peshawar, a pharmacy owner lost all his employees after *khatm-e-nabuwat* activists threatened him and his staff. Also in Peshawar, the children of one Ahmadi family were expelled from a private school for their faith. There was a surge in condemnations of Ahmadis following formerly imprisoned Ahmadi Abdul Shakoor's participation in a July 17 meeting of religious persecution survivors with President Trump at the White House. On July 26, Bareilvi Sunni groups observed a nationwide “black day” against the government's so-called pro-Ahmadiyya stance and held rallies in major cities. Although the rallies were not covered in print or electronic media, photographs and video footage circulated on social media. Ahmadiyya Muslim community representatives also noted an increase in social harassment in July and August after Shakoor's participation in the White House meeting. In Toba Tek Singh District, Punjab Province, local residents organized a *khatm-e-nabuwat* procession, forced a young Ahmadi man to abandon his job and leave the town, and attacked the home of a recent convert to Ahmadiyya Islam. According to media reports, in August the Islamabad Bar Association made membership for anyone identifying as Muslim contingent on swearing an oath to the finality of prophethood. Islamist

politician Maulana Fazlur Rehman gave several speeches attacking Ahmadis and accusing Prime Minister Khan of being sympathetic to Ahmadis during a two-week protest in November.

Christian religious freedom activists continued to report widespread discrimination against Christians in private employment. They said Christians had difficulty finding jobs other than those involving menial labor; some advertisements for menial jobs even specified they were open only to Christian applicants. Media reported Javed Masih, a Christian, was killed by his employer, Abbas Olaf, after informing Abbas he was leaving the farm job for which he was paid less than minimum wage. Yasir Talib, an activist who collaborates with the Punjab Provincial Ministry for Human Rights and Minority Affairs in Faisalabad, said, “Many Muslims also work in the fields, but conditions for Christians are four times worse.” In November Christian journalist Gonila Gill stated she resigned her job in Lahore after harassment from Muslim coworkers pressuring her to convert to Islam and denigrating her religion.

Observers reported English-language media covered issues facing religious minorities in an objective manner, but Urdu-language media continued to show bias in reporting on minority religious groups, including multiple instances in which media censored references to Ahmadis on talk shows, used inflammatory language, or made inappropriate references to minorities. Many Facebook users posted a profile frame calling for the death of Ahmadis after formerly imprisoned Ahmadi Abdul Shakoor’s participation in a July 17 meeting of religious persecution survivors at the White House. Facebook removed the profile frame on July 31 and said the company did not tolerate any content that incites violence.

Human rights and religious freedom activists and members of minority religious groups continued to report that they exercised caution and, occasionally, self-censorship when speaking in favor of religious tolerance because of a societal climate of intolerance and fear. Some activists reported receiving death threats because of their work.

Reports continued of attacks on religious minorities’ holy places, cemeteries, and religious symbols. On February 6, unknown vandals broke into a Hindu temple and burned religious scriptures and images in Kumb, Sindh Province. Prime Minister Khan condemned the incident as “against the teachings of the Quran” and urged the Sindh government to take “swift and decisive action” against the perpetrators. On April 21, vandals broke into a Shia mosque in Karachi and damaged books, religious symbols, and names of the family of the Prophet Muhammad. Police registered complaints from the mosque’s leader under the antiblasphemy law. In May unknown individuals vandalized a Christian cemetery in the village of Okara, Punjab, destroying crosses and desecrating the graves of two priests.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

The Charge d’Affaires, consuls general, other embassy officers, and visiting senior U.S. officials met with government officials and senior advisors to the prime minister, including the minister for human rights, and officials from the Ministry of Law and

Justice, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony to discuss blasphemy law reform; laws concerning Ahmadi Muslims; the need to better protect members of religious minority communities; sectarian relations; and religious respect.

In February the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom met with cabinet members, religious leaders, and members of civil society. The Ambassador at Large expressed concern about the country's blasphemy laws and individuals serving life sentences or facing death under these laws, as well as the country's anti-Ahmadi laws and sectarian violence, with the ministers of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony, and Human Rights, and the foreign secretary. The Ambassador at Large also recognized the government for positive steps taken to advance the rights of religious minorities, such as statements by leadership condemning violence, threats, or denigration of individuals on the basis of their faith. The Ambassador at Large hosted a roundtable discussion with representatives of various religious communities on religious freedom conditions and ways to improve them. He also visited the Eidgah Sharif Shrine in Rawalpindi and discussed opportunities to promote interfaith harmony among persons of all faith traditions.

The U.S. government funded a police curriculum development program in Sindh which included a module on human rights. This training, which every recruit and in-service trainee completes, included lessons on identifying forced conversions and training police on how to protect the rights of religious minorities.

In April the Charge d'Affaires toured the Eidgah Sharif Shrine in Rawalpindi to show respect for a uniquely South Asian expression of Islam and demonstrate the importance of interfaith engagement. The Charge d'Affaires and other embassy officers met with groups of civil society and interfaith activists to discuss the situation of religious minorities and other vulnerable communities and avenues for engagement by U.S. government representatives.

In April the Consul General in Karachi led a delegation of Muslim, Catholic, Sikh, Bohra Muslim, and Parsi faith leaders and community representatives on a tour of different religious sites in Karachi to celebrate interfaith harmony and religious freedom. Diplomats from the United Kingdom, Germany, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, and Japan also participated in the tour. On November 22, the Charge d'Affaires and the Consul General in Peshawar discussed religious freedom and respect with Muslim and Christian clerics at Peshawar's historic Mohabbat Khan Mosque.

Embassy officers met with civil society leaders, experts, and journalists to stress the need to protect the rights of religious minorities and continue to support measures that decrease sectarian violence. They also met with representatives of other embassies, leaders of religious communities, NGOs, and legal experts working on religious freedom issues to discuss ways to increase respect between religions and enhance dialogue. Department of State programs helped to promote peacebuilding among religious and community leaders.

The Secretary of State praised the safe departure of Asia Bibi from Pakistan in May, and the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom expressed concern about the Junaid Hafeez blasphemy verdict on December 23. The embassy released videos discussing religious freedom and respect throughout the year.

On December 18, the Secretary of State redesignated Pakistan as a CPC under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, as amended, for having engaged in or tolerated severe violations of religious freedom, and announced a waiver of the sanctions that accompany designation as required in the important national interests of the United States.

ecoi.net summary:

Annual report on religious freedom (covering 2019)



Country:

Pakistan

Source:

USDOS – US Department of State [\(/en/source/11558.html\)](/en/source/11558.html)

Original link:

<https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-report-on-international-religious-freedom/pakistan/>
[\(https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-report-on-international-religious-freedom/pakistan/\)](https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-report-on-international-religious-freedom/pakistan/)

Document type:

Periodical Report

Language:

English

Published:

10 June 2020

Document ID:

2031283

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ecoi.net is run by the Austrian Red Cross (department ACCORD) in cooperation with Informationsverbund Asyl & Migration. ecoi.net is funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Austrian Ministry of the Interior and Caritas Austria. ecoi.net is supported by ECRE & UNHCR.

