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Pakistan

International Religious Freedom Report 2007

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The country is an Islamic republic. Islam is the state religion and the Constitution requires that laws 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;" however, in practice the Government imposes limits on freedom of religion. Freedom of speech is constitutionally "subject to any reasonable restrictions imposed by law in the interest of the glory of Islam."

The Government took some steps to improve its treatment of religious minorities during the period covered by this report, but serious problems remained. Law enforcement personnel abused religious minorities in custody. Security forces and other government agencies did not adequately prevent or address societal abuse against minorities. Discriminatory legislation and the Government's failure to take action against societal forces hostile to those who practice a different faith fostered religious intolerance, acts of violence, and intimidation against religious minorities. Specific laws that discriminate against religious minorities include anti-Ahmadi and blasphemy laws that provide the death penalty for defiling Islam or its prophets. The Government enacted the Women's Protection Act, which amended the Hudood Ordinances, by moving rape and adultery cases from the Shari'a to secular courts. President Pervez Musharraf ordered the release of all women imprisoned under the Hudood Ordinances; few remain in custody, and most are housed in Government-run group homes.

The Ahmadiyya community continued to face governmental and societal discrimination and legal bars to the practice of its faith. Members of other Islamic sects also claimed governmental discrimination.

Relations between religious communities were tense. Societal discrimination against religious minorities was widespread, and societal violence against such groups occurred. Societal actors, including terrorist and extremist groups and individuals, targeted religious congregations.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. During the period covered by this report, U.S. Embassy officials closely monitored the treatment of religious minorities and worked to eliminate the teaching of religious intolerance and encourage amendment of the blasphemy laws.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 310,527 square miles and a population of 168 million. Official figures on religious demography, based on the most recent census, taken in 1998, showed that approximately 96 percent of the population was Muslim. Groups comprising 2 percent of the population or less include Hindus, Christians, and others including Ahmadis. The majority of Muslims in the country are Sunni, with a Shi'a minority ranging between 10 to 20 percent. Parsis (Zoroastrians), Sikhs, and Buddhists each had approximately 20,000 adherents, while the Baha'i claimed 30,000. Some tribes in Baluchistan and North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) practiced traditional animist religions.

Less than 0.5 percent of the population was silent on religion or claimed not to adhere to a particular religious group. Social pressure was such that few persons would claim no religious affiliation.

No data were available on active participation in formal religious services or rituals. Religion often played an important part in daily life. Most Muslims offered prayers on Friday, Islam's holy day. Many prayed daily. During the month of Ramadan, many less observant Muslims fasted and attended services. Approximately 70 percent of English-speaking Roman Catholics worshiped regularly; a much lower percentage of Urdu speaking Catholics did so. Attendance at Hindu religious services increased during festivals.

Foreign missionaries operate in the country.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution establishes Islam as the state religion. It also declares that adequate provisions shall be made for minorities to profess and practice their religions freely; however, in reality the Government imposes limits on freedom of religion, particularly on Ahmadis.

A 1974 constitutional amendment declares Ahmadis to be non-Muslim. Section 298(c), commonly referred to as the "anti-Ahmadi laws," prohibits Ahmadis from calling themselves Muslims, referring to their faith as Islam, preaching or propagating their faith, inviting others to accept the Ahmadi faith, or insulting the religious feelings of Muslims. The punishment for violation of the section is imprisonment for up to 3 years and a fine. Other religious communities were generally free to observe their religious obligations; however, religious minorities are legally restricted from public display of certain religious images and, due to discriminatory legislation and social pressure, are often afraid to profess their religion freely.

Freedom of speech is subject to "reasonable" restrictions in the interests of the "glory of Islam." The consequences for contravening the country's blasphemy laws are death for defiling Islam or its prophets; life imprisonment for defiling, damaging, or desecrating the Qur'an; and 10 years' imprisonment for insulting another's religious feelings. These laws are often used to settle personal scores as well as to intimidate reform-minded Muslims, sectarian opponents, and religious minorities. Under the Anti-Terrorist Act, any action, including speech, intended to stir up religious hatred is punishable by up to 7 years of imprisonment. Under the act, bail is not to be granted if the judge has reasonable grounds to believe that the accused is guilty; however, the law is applied selectively.

In addition, any speech or conduct that injures another's religious feelings, including those of minority religious groups, is prohibited and punishable by imprisonment. However, in cases where the religious feelings of a minority religion were insulted, the blasphemy laws were rarely enforced and cases rarely brought to the legal system. A 2005 law requires that a senior police official investigate any blasphemy charge before a complaint is filed.

The Penal Code ostensibly incorporates a number of Islamic law (Shari'a) provisions. The judicial system encompasses several different court systems with overlapping and sometimes competing jurisdictions that reflect differences in civil, criminal, and Islamic jurisprudence. The federal Shari'a court and the Shari'a bench of the Supreme Court serve as appellate courts for certain convictions in criminal court under the Hudood Ordinances; judges and attorneys in these courts must be Muslim. The federal Shari'a court may overturn any legislation judged to be inconsistent with the tenets of Islam. In March 2005, in a blow to the power of the Shariat appellate benches, the Supreme Court Chief Justice, issuing a stay in the Mukhtaran Mai rape case, ruled that the federal Shari'a court had no jurisdiction to review a decision by a provincial high court even if the federal Shari'a court should have had initial appellate jurisdiction.

Criminal law allows offenders to offer monetary restitution to victims and allows victims to carry out physical retribution rather than seek punishment through the court system. This supposedly Islamic provision applied to all. Religious minorities claimed that minority offenders faced far higher, and minority victims received far lower, amounts of monetary restitution than did Muslims.

President Musharraf strongly promoted, and on December 1, 2006, signed into law the Protection of Women Act, which essentially moved cases of rape and adultery to secular rather than Shari'a courts. Previously, the Hudood Ordinances, which criminalize rape, extramarital sex, property crimes, alcohol, and gambling, often relied on harsh and discriminatory Qur'anic standards of evidence and punishment, which applied equally to Muslims and non-Muslims. If Qur'anic standards are used, Muslim and non-Muslim and male and female testimony carries different weight.

The Government designates religion on passports and national identity cards. Citizens must have a national identity card to vote. Those wishing to be listed as a Muslim must swear to believe that Muhammad is the final prophet and denounce the Ahmadiyya movement's founder as a false prophet and his followers as non-Muslims, a provision designed to discriminate against Ahmadis. Initial voter registration no longer required such an oath, but the Election Commission claimed that any Muslim registrant whose religion was challenged by the public would have to take the oath. As a result, Ahmadis continued to boycott elections.

The Constitution provides for the "freedom to manage religious institutions." In principle, the Government does not restrict organized religious groups from establishing places of worship and training members of the clergy. In practice, however, religious minorities suffered from restrictions on this right.

The state provides funding for construction and maintenance of mosques and for Islamic clergy. The provincial and federal governments have legal responsibility for certain religious properties belonging to minority communities that were abandoned during partition. Minority communities claimed the Government did not spend adequate funds on their protection and upkeep. The Government collected a 2.5 percent tax ("zakaat") on all Sunni Muslims, which was distributed to Sunni mosques and charities. No similar requirement was imposed on other religious groups.

Government policies do not afford equal protection to members of majority and minority religious groups. The Ministry of Religious Affairs, which is mandated to safeguard religious freedom, claims it spends 30 percent of its annual budget to assist indigent minorities, repair minority places of worship, set up minority-run small development schemes, and celebrate minority festivals. However, religious minorities questioned these figures, observing that localities and villages housing minority citizens go without basic civic amenities. The Ministry had on its masthead a Qur'anic verse: "Islam is the only religion acceptable to God."

Muslim religious holidays are national holidays.

The Constitution safeguards "educational institutions with respect to religion." No student can be forced to receive religious instruction or participate in religious worship other than his or her own. The denial of religious instruction for students of any religious community or denomination is also prohibited.

"Islamiyyat" (Islamic studies) was compulsory for all Muslim students in state-run schools. Although students of other religious groups were not legally required to study Islam, they were not provided with parallel studies in their own religions. In some schools non-Muslim students could study "Akhlaiyyat," or Ethics.

The Constitution specifically prohibits discriminatory admission to any governmental educational institution solely based on religion. Government officials stated that the only factors affecting admission to governmental educational institutions were students' grades and home provinces; however, students must declare their religion on application forms. Muslim students must declare in writing that they believe that Muhammad is the final prophet, a measure that singles out Ahmadis. Non-Muslims must have their religion verified by the head of their local religious community.

Parents were free to send children to religious schools, at their expense, and many did. Private schools were free to teach or not teach religion as they choose.

Islamic schools known as madrassahs are traditional institutions for Muslims seeking a purely religious education; in recent years many madrassahs have taught extremist doctrine in support of terrorism. In many rural communities they are the only form of education available. In an attempt to curb the spread of extremism, the 2002 Madrassah Registration Ordinance required all madrassahs to register with one of the five independent boards (wafaqs), cease accepting foreign financing, and accept foreign students only with the consent of their government. According to the Interior Ministry, 95 percent of foreign madrassah students departed by the July 2005 deadline imposed by President Musharraf. According to the Religious Affairs Ministry, approximately 11,000 out of an estimated 13,000 to 15,000 madrassahs had registered by the end of the reporting period.

In December 2005 President Musharraf laid out the framework for cooperative registration of madrassahs with the Government, including provision of financial and educational data and a prohibition on the teaching of sectarian or religious hatred and violence. The Government and the independent madrassah boards agreed to a phased introduction of secular subjects, including math, English, and science at all madrassahs.

All wafaqs mandated the elimination of teaching that promoted religious or sectarian intolerance and terrorist or extremist recruitment at madrassahs. Inspectors mandated that affiliated madrassahs supplement religious studies with secular subjects, including English, math, and science. Wafaqs also restricted foreign private funding of madrassahs. Examination concerns remained under active discussion with the Government. Some unregistered and Deobandi-controlled madrassahs in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and northern Balochistan continued to teach extremism. Similarly, the Dawa schools run by Jamat-ud-Dawa continued such teaching and recruitment for Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, a designated foreign terrorist organization.

A March 2007 report indicated that unregulated, extremist madrassahs in Karachi continued to thrive in the sprawling city with a large population of young, unemployed men. International Crisis Group reported that after 5 years of trying to reform madrassahs, the Government's program has not fully succeeded, and that extremist groups were operating mosques and madrassahs in the open in Karachi and elsewhere, due to lack of consistent regulation.

The Mutahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA)-led provincial government, a coalition of six conservative parties in the NWFP, continued to pass directives and legislation in accordance with conservative Islamic views. If implemented, many of these initiatives would impose Islamic law on all citizens, regardless of religious affiliation. Existing laws include antiobscenity measures under which advertising has been torn down, stores have been fined for selling certain western recordings, a complete ban on alcohol, and a requirement for civil servants to pray five times daily.

The Government does not restrict religious publishing in general; however, the sale of Ahmadi religious literature is banned. The law prohibits publishing any criticism of Islam or its prophets or insults to another's religion.

The Government, at its most senior levels, continued to call for interfaith dialogue and sectarian harmony as part of its program to promote enlightened moderation. The Religious Affairs Ministry and the Council on Islamic Ideology, a constitutionally mandated government body, continued to sponsor interfaith and intersectoral workshops and meetings. The primary responsibility of the Religious Affairs Ministry is to organize participation in the Hajj and other

Muslim religious pilgrimages and to distribute zakaat.

The Government did not prohibit, restrict, or punish parents for raising children in accordance with religious teachings and practices of their choice, nor did it take steps to prevent parents from teaching their children religion in the privacy of the home.

There are no legal requirements for an individual to practice or affiliate nominally with a religion. However, the Constitution requires that the president and prime minister be Muslims. All senior officials, including members of parliament, must swear an oath to protect the country's Islamic identity. Government employees are not prohibited from displaying or practicing any elements of their faith.

Missionaries (except Ahmadis) operate in the country and can proselytize, as long as there is no preaching against Islam and the missionaries acknowledge they are not Muslim. Missionaries are required to have specific visas, valid from 2 to 5 years and are allowed one entry into the country per year. Only "replacement" visas for those taking the place of departing missionaries were available, and long delays and bureaucratic problems were frequent.

In accordance with the Anti-Terrorist Act, the Government banned the activities of and membership in several religious extremist and terrorist groups. The Anti-Terrorist Act allows the Government to use special streamlined courts to try violent crimes, terrorist activities, acts or speech designed to foment religious hatred, and crimes against the state; however, many of the groups that the Government banned remained active.

The state does not recognize either civil or common law marriage. Marriages are performed and registered according to one's religion. The marriages of non-Muslim men remain legal upon conversion to Islam but are considered dissolved for marriages of female converts to Islam if they were performed under the rites of their previous religion. Children born to Hindu or Christian women who convert to Islam after marriage are considered illegitimate unless their husbands also convert. Children of non-Muslim men who convert are considered legitimate. A Muslim man can marry a woman "of the Book" (Jew or Christian) but cannot marry a woman of any other faith unless she converts to Islam, Judaism, or Christianity. Muslim women may only marry Muslim men. The children of a Muslim man and a Muslim woman who both convert to another religion are considered illegitimate and are seized by the state. In addition, a convert from Islam becomes an apostate and is eligible for the death penalty.

In effect, the state recognizes a marriage if both bride and groom are of the same religion, irrespective of the sect, or if the Groom is Muslim and bride is "of the Book."

Children born to these couples are considered legitimate. If the bride is Muslim and groom is not, they are not considered married and their children are illegitimate. Since Muslim males are not allowed to convert to any other religion, the only way the marriage can be legitimated and the children made eligible for inheritance is if the groom converts to Islam.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government used anti-Ahmadi laws to target and harass Ahmadis. The vague wording of the provision that forbids Ahmadis from directly or indirectly posing as Muslims enabled officials to bring charges against Ahmadis for using the standard Muslim greeting form and for naming their children Muhammad. The Ahmadi community claimed that during the period covered by this report, 28 Ahmadis faced criminal charges under religious laws or because of their faith: 4 under the blasphemy laws, 17 under Ahmadi-specific laws, and 7 under other laws but motivated by their Ahmadi faith.

At the end of April 2006, four Ahmadis were in prison on blasphemy charges; one was in prison and two more were out on bail facing murder charges that the Ahmadiyya community claimed were falsely brought due to their religious beliefs. Seven more criminal cases, ranging from murder to destruction of property, were filed against prominent members of the Ahmadi community during the reporting period. The cases remained unprosecuted and the accused were allowed to post bail.

Ahmadis continued to be arrested for preaching their faith. In July 2006 four Ahmadis were arrested in Sialkot District under the anti-Ahmadi laws for preaching.

In August 2006 Mian Mohammed Yar was charged under the anti-Ahmadi laws on the charge of preaching. He was the president of the local Ahmadi community.

Since 1983 Ahmadis have been prohibited from holding public conferences or gatherings, they have been denied permission to hold their annual conference. Ahmadis were banned from preaching and were prohibited from traveling to Saudi Arabia for the Hajj or other religious pilgrimages. Ahmadi publications were banned from public sale, but they published religious literature in large quantities for a limited circulation.

While the Constitution guarantees the right to establish places of worship and train clergy, in practice Ahmadis suffered from restrictions on this right. According to press reports, authorities continued to conduct surveillance on Ahmadis and their institutions. Several Ahmadi mosques reportedly were closed; others reportedly were desecrated or had their construction stopped.

Public pressure routinely prevented courts from protecting minority rights. These same pressures forced justices to take strong action against any perceived offense to Sunni orthodoxy. Discrimination against religious minorities was rarely placed before the judiciary. Courts would be unlikely to act objectively in such cases. Resolving cases was very slow; there was generally a long period between filing the case and the first court appearance. Lower courts were frequently intimidated, delayed decisions, and refused bail for fear of reprisal from extremist elements. Bail in blasphemy cases was usually denied by original trial courts, arguing that since defendants faced the death penalty, they were likely to flee. Many defendants appealed the denial of bail, but bail was often not granted in advance of the trial.

In schools, teachers required many non-Muslim students to complete Islamic studies. Christian students were also reportedly forced to eat at separate tables in public schools that are predominately Muslim.

Many district governments restricted the distribution and display of certain religious images, such as the Holy Trinity and Jesus Christ; however, such images were readily available in other parts of the country.

Religious belief or specific adherence to a religion was not required for membership in the ruling party or the moderate opposition parties, which did not exclude members of any religion. The MMA had non-Muslim Members of Parliament; however, in practice, each of its constituent parties generally restricted membership to its sectarian adherents.

The Government did not restrict the formation of political parties based on a particular faith, religious belief, or interpretation of religious doctrine. The Government monitored the activities of various Islamist parties and affiliated clergy due to prior links to terrorist and extremist organizations.

Foreign books must pass government censors before being reprinted. Books and magazines may be imported freely but are subject to censorship for objectionable sexual or religious content.

The Government funded and facilitated Hajj travel but had no similar program for pilgrimages by religious minorities. In addition to prohibiting Ahmadi travel for the Hajj, the Government prevented Baha'is from traveling to their spiritual center in Israel due to nonrecognition of that country.

Sunni Muslims appeared to receive favorable consideration in government hiring and advancement. Shi'a and other religious minorities contended that the Government persistently discriminated against members of their communities in hiring for the civil service and in admissions to government institutions of higher learning. Promotions for all minority groups appeared limited within the civil service. These problems were particularly acute for Ahmadis, who contended that a "glass ceiling" prevented them from being promoted to senior positions and that certain government departments refused to hire or retain qualified Ahmadis. The Government discriminated against some groups, such as Ahl-e-Hadith and Bareilvi, when hiring clergy for government mosques and faculty members for Islamic government colleges.

There are reserved seats for religious minority members in both the national and provincial assemblies. Such seats are allocated to the political parties on a proportional basis determined by their overall representation in the assembly.

Members of minority religious groups volunteered for military service in small numbers, and there were no official obstacles to their advancement; however, in practice non-Muslims rarely rose above the rank of colonel and were not assigned to politically sensitive positions. A chaplaincy corps provided services for Muslim soldiers, but no similar services were available for religious minorities. During this reporting period, a Sikh graduated from the military academy in Abbottabad for the first time.

The public school curriculum included derogatory remarks in textbooks against minority religious groups, particularly Hindus and Jews, and the generalized teaching of religious intolerance was acceptable. The Government continued to modernize curriculum to eliminate such teachings and to remove Islamic overtones from secular subjects. Instead of a mandatory Islamic studies class, the Education Minister supported offering an ethics class as an alternative. The Government discriminated against Ahmadis and Christians when they applied for entry to university and medical school because of their religious affiliation.

Officials used bureaucratic demands and bribes to delay religious groups trying to build houses of worship or to obtain land. While Ahmadis were prevented from building houses of worship, Sunni Muslim groups built mosques and shrines without government permission, at times in violation of zoning ordinances and upon government-owned lands.

Nearly all women charged under the Hudood Ordinances were released following the passage of the Women's Protection Act. Several hundred remain within the legal system, but they were now housed in various Daarul Amaans

(state operated women's shelters). Many were unable to return to their homes because of social ostracism.

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Police commonly tortured and mistreated those in custody and at times engaged in extrajudicial killings. It was usually impossible to ascertain whether religion was a factor in cases in which religious minorities were victims; however, both Christian and Ahmadi communities claimed their members were more likely to be abused. Non-Muslim prisoners generally were accorded poorer facilities than Muslim inmates.

Authorities routinely used the blasphemy laws to harass religious minorities and reform-minded Muslims and to settle personal scores or business rivalries. Authorities detained and convicted individuals on spurious charges. Judges and magistrates, seeking to avoid a confrontation with or violence from extremists, often continued trials indefinitely.

Ahmadi leaders claimed the Government used regular sections of the Penal Code against their members for religious reasons. Authorities often accused converts to the Ahmadiyya community of blasphemy, violations of the anti-Ahmadi laws, or other crimes. Conversion to other minority religious groups generally took place in secret to avoid a societal backlash.

During the reporting period, authorities arrested at least 25 Ahmadis, 10 Christians, and 6 Muslims on blasphemy charges. Many remained in prison at the end of the reporting period. The National Commission for Justice and Peace stated that "Generally we do not request bail because of security. Blasphemy suspects are often safest in prison under police protection."

In May 2007 officials released on bail Martha Bibi, a Christian accused of blasphemy. She had been in prison since her arrest in January 2007. Accused of making derogatory remarks against the Qur'an, she claimed the charges originated from Muslim contractors who did not want to pay for materials sold to them by Bibi's husband.

In May 2007 authorities arrested Walter Fazal Khan for blasphemy. Walter is an 84-year old Christian accused of burning a Qur'an. The family claimed he was a victim of Muslim businessmen who wanted to buy land Khan was selling for much lower than the asking price. After his arrest, local religious leaders forced Khan's 86-year old wife to convert to Islam.

In April 2007 a mob tortured a Catholic man, Sattar Masih, before police arrived and arrested him for allegedly writing blasphemous words against the Prophet Muhammad. Police reportedly tortured him again in prison to obtain a confession.

In April 2007 officials accused Salamat Masih, a Christian in Toba Tek Singh, and four members of his family of desecrating papers bearing the Prophet Muhammad's name. Officials arrested Salamat, but the other four remained in hiding, including Salamat's 11-year old son.

In March 2007 a mob of Muslims attacked Amanat Masih, a Christian, for allegedly desecrating the Qur'an. Police arrested Masih for blasphemy. At the end of the reporting period, he was still in prison.

In January 2007 a court acquitted Shahbaz Masih, a Christian who was convicted of blasphemy more than 2 years ago. The courts determined he was mentally unstable and cut short his 25-year sentence. Including his pretrial detention, he had been in jail for nearly 6 years after he was accused of ripping pages of a Qur'an in a Muslim graveyard.

In January 2007 Shahid Masih, a 17-year old Christian arrested on blasphemy charges 4 months earlier, was released on \$1,650 bail and immediately went into hiding, afraid of the reaction of local radical Muslims who had been following the case. He reported that fellow prisoners beat him in prison because of his alleged crime, until police put him in a private cell. Authorities accused him and a Muslim friend of tearing pages out of a book that included the Qur'an.

On November 27, 2006, courts convicted Catholics James Masih and Buta Masih of blasphemy for allegedly burning a Qur'an and sentenced them to 10 years in prison.

On November 10, 2006, a court overturned Ranjha Masih's life sentence for blasphemy. He was convicted in April 2003.

In October 2006 police arrested Ahmadi Mohammed Tariq and charged him under blasphemy laws for allegedly tearing off anti-Ahmadiyya stickers inside a bus. Police released him on bail in December 2006 and at the end of the reporting period, he was awaiting trial.

In September 2006 police released on bail two Ahmadi journalists working for an Ahmadi publication, Al Fazl, whom

they had charged under blasphemy laws. Three others from Al Fazl, an editor, a publisher, and a printer, remained in confinement awaiting court proceedings on the same charges.

In July 2006 courts released on bail Hafiz Afzal Rehman and Hiji Latif, who had been held in a Lahore prison on blasphemy charges since 2004. Their trials were pending.

Minority communities charged the Government was complicit in seizures of their property by Muslims and that the government policy of dismantling illegal slum settlements disproportionately targeted minority communities. These groups also accused the Government of inaction in cases of attacks by extremist groups on places of worship belonging to minority groups.

In the spring of 2007, members of the Ahmadi community purchased 6 acres of land outside Lahore to expand a preexisting cemetery. Local clerics denounced the purchase and held demonstrations against the Ahmadi community. Police sided with the clerics, and local authorities claimed the construction of a wall on the land would be used to form a "center of apostasy." When the Ahmadis refused to remove the wall, five buses of policemen arrived and destroyed it in the middle of the night. Officials admitted the action was taken under pressure of local clerics.

In March 2007 more than 160 Christian prisoners at Adiala Jail in Punjab participated in a 2-day hunger strike until authorities returned their place of worship, a laundry room.

In December 2006 a local mullah collaborated with police to prevent the burial of Bakht Bibi, an Ahmadi woman, in the common village graveyard. She was finally buried on private land 1.5 kilometers away. The same mullah had convinced police to close an Ahmadi prayer center 1 month prior.

In October 2006 police stopped construction of a new Ahmadi school in Sialkot district. Mullahs reportedly then destroyed the partially constructed building.

In September 2006 Malik Saif ur Rahman, the president of a local Ahmadi organization, completed construction of a small mosque on the property of his farm. The local mullah objected to police. Later, a contingent of police in plain clothes came and destroyed it.

In September 2006, in two separate incidents, courts based custody decisions on allegations that the Christian mothers would convert their children to Christianity, and so gave custody of the children to their Muslim fathers. The fathers, however, were suspected of kidnapping their children from the ex-wives. In the first case, a Muslim Pakistani man was given custody of his 12-year old daughter Molly because his ex-wife had reconverted to Christianity. Sajad Ahmed Rana gained custody of Molly after telling courts in Lahore that Molly's mother was living with a man in Scotland she was not married to and was not raising Molly in an Islamic home. Molly disappeared from her school in Scotland and reappeared several days later with her father in Lahore. In the second case, a Muslim man was arrested for kidnapping two children from his ex-wife in 2004. He had kidnapped them during supervised visitation because he was afraid his ex-wife would convert the children to Christianity.

In June 2006, following an attack during which a mob injured two Ahmadis and destroyed their property, Sialkot District police arrested seven Ahmadis and removed 75 from the village for fear of more attacks. Police arrested four Ahmadis for alleged Qur'an desecration. Later, hundreds of persons demonstrated against the alleged desecration and damaged an Ahmadiyya house of worship. Police deployed to avert more damage.

In September 2006 a Sindh district court granted provisional bail for three Ahmadis who had been in hiding, fearing arrests on charges of attempted conversion. Police had previously arrested two other Ahmadis, to whom the higher Sessions Court had granted bail.

In April 2006 an appellate court acquitted a Christian school teacher of blasphemy charges and released him after five years in detention.

In November 2005 Catholic Bishop Anthony Lobo alleged that the Government evicted approximately 200 Christians from their homes in Sindh and gave these homes to Muslim victims of the October 2005 earthquake.

In September 2005 in Lahore, Younis Masih, a Christian, confronted an Islamic cleric about loud music accompanying a night time religious ceremony. During the course of their altercation, Masih allegedly insulted Muhammad. Police arrested Masih on charges of blasphemy, and shortly thereafter a mob attacked the Christian community. Masih was sentenced to death by the district court in Lahore on May 30, 2007. The case was on appeal at the end of the reporting period.

There was no action expected in the September 2005 case in which NWFP police arrested a Hindu couple on charges of defiling the Qur'an. The courts released them on bail after each had converted to Islam before officials.

In June 2005 police in NWFP arrested Yousuf Masih, an illiterate Christian janitor on blasphemy charges. Witnesses claimed Masih had burned pages of the Qur'an while disposing of trash for his employer. Police later dropped charges against him; mobs subsequently burned three churches, a convent, and other Christian facilities in the Sangala Hills area. Human rights groups charged that police severely mistreated Masih, which led to a deterioration in his health.

The Government did not subject individuals to forced labor or enslavement based on religious beliefs; however, minority community leaders charged that the Government failed to take adequate action to prevent bonded labor in both the brickmaking and agricultural sectors. Christians and Hindus were disproportionately victims of this practice. In June 2005, police raided sites in Punjab Province, and freed more than 300 mostly Christian workers performing forced labor in brick kilns.

Between July and December 2004, at least eight separate incidents of anti-Ahmadi arrests occurred, many involving blasphemy charges. In most cases, police released the victim or dismissed the charges without trial.

While murder charges were pending against police officers involved in the August 2004 death-in-custody of Nasir Mukhtar, a Christian, no arrests were made during the period covered by this report.

In July 2004 police arrested a Christian girl, who was accused of throwing a copy of the Qur'an into a local dump, and her father. A Muslim mob threatened to burn down the family residence and tried to kill the girl. The two were eventually released and the family moved to ensure their safety.

In July 2004 local government officials in the Bahawalpur District evicted 26 Hindu families and allotted their land to local Muslims.

Following July 2004 protests, police in Chenab Nagar (Rabwah) continued to retain property of the local Ahmadiyya community on which a makeshift mosque had once existed.

Forced Religious Conversion

Forced and coerced conversions of religious minorities to Islam occurred at the hands of societal actors. Religious minorities claimed that government actions to stem the problem were inadequate. Representatives of the Hindu community in Sindh claim the forced conversion (usually related to familial debts) of 15 to 20 Hindu families per year. Human rights groups have highlighted the increased phenomenon of Hindu girls, particularly in Karachi and other parts of Sindh, being kidnapped from their families by local actors, forced to convert to Islam, and forced to marry their kidnappers. The kidnappers then produce a document claiming the girl is a convert and a willing bride. Since apostasy is a capital offense, the victim is trapped.

In February 2007 a Muslim employer kidnapped two Christian brothers for refusing to convert to Islam and tortured for a month. They eventually escaped and are in hiding.

In May 2007 local religious authorities forced an 86-year old Christian woman to convert to Islam after her husband was arrested on blasphemy charges.

On December 6, 2006, police in Multan rescued Azra Bibi, whose employer abducted her and tried to force her to convert to Islam and marry him.

Also in December 2006 a tutor kidnapped and forcibly converted a girl to Islam in Tharparkar, Sindh. The tutor backed up his claim with a decree issued by the seminary where he taught. Police refused to register the case despite complaints from the girl's family.

On July 11, 2006, Kenneth Gill, a Christian, age 15, was forced into a mosque in Sheikhpura by Muslim youths. Gill reportedly converted to Islam, only to later claim he was not a willing convert. Local clerics accused him of apostasy and he was arrested. Gill was released on August 7, 2006, and is reported to have moved out of the region.

On June 27, 2006, 13-year old Pampi Mai, a Christian, was abducted by the family of a Muslim friend she was visiting. The police reluctantly registered the case, but no arrests had been made at the end of the reporting period.

Between August 2004 and June 2006 there were at least seven confirmed cases of abduction and forced conversion. Many of these cases involved severe physical violence and rape of the victims.

There were no reports of forced conversion of minor United States citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States.

Persecution by Terrorist Organizations

There were several incidents involving the abuse of religious groups carried out by individuals or organizations designated as terrorist organizations by the U.S. Secretary of State under Section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act and by armed sectarian extremist groups with strong links to such organizations.

Nationwide, the sectarian violence situation remained unchanged during the period covered by this report.

Targeted assassinations of clergy remained a key tactic of several groups, including the banned sectarian organization Sipah-i-Sahaba (SSP), the terrorist organization Lashkar-i-Jhangvi (LJ), and the sectarian organizations Sunni Tehrike (ST) and Sipah-i-Mohammad (SMP). SSP and LJ targeted both Shi'a and Barelvis, whereas ST and SMP targeted Deobandis.

On December 23, 2006, Nazakat Ali Umrani, a professor at the Gomal University Management Sciences Department was shot dead by unidentified gunmen (4 months after his brother was killed) in D.I. Khan. He was a Shi'a.

On December 24, 2006, there was a shooting incident during a funeral in D.I. Khan in which four Sunnis were killed and four were injured. The incident resulted in a day of protests and clashes between Shi'a and Sunni communities in D.I. Khan.

Two unknown gunmen killed a Shi'a leader Jawad Hussain on February 14, 2007, near Chaman Chowk in D.I. Khan.

On March 9, 2007, Syed Anwar Abbas, a Shi'a businessman, was shot and killed outside his shop in D.I. Khan. The brother of Anwar, Moodi Shah, was a Shi'a activist and a former mayor.

On March 13, 2007, Mohammad Farooq, the Sunni prayer leader of Jamia Masjid Kalan mosque and a member of the SSP, was shot and killed while he was on his way to a bazaar in D.I. Khan. On the same day two gunmen opened fire on Hafiz Ishaq, an SSP activist, in his shop. He received critical injuries.

Both LJ and SSP continued attacks on houses of worship and religious gatherings during the period covered by this report.

Al-Qa'ida-linked organizations maintained networks in the country, and its supporters periodically issued anti-Semitic and anti-Shi'a statements.

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The Government took steps to bolster religious freedom during the period covered by this report.

President Musharraf ordered the release of all women imprisoned under the Hudood Ordinances; few remained in custody, and most were housed in Government-run group homes.

In December 2006 a Supreme Court decision prevented provincial action on the Hasba Bill in the NWFP that would have created a parallel judicial system in that province based on Shari'a.

The Government remained in active negotiations with the wafaq boards, which oversee the vast majority of the country's madrassahs to implement recent registration provisions (see section II).

The Government continued to include human rights awareness as part of its police training program.

The World Council of Religions in Islamabad, assisted by leaders from Islamic, Christian, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, and Parsi communities and backed by President Musharraf, continued to organize interfaith dialogue sessions throughout the country. The Religious Affairs Ministry and the Islamic Ideology Council continued to organize smaller intersectoral and interfaith meetings and dialogue sessions. Following these meetings, Deobandi and JI religious and political leaders significantly toned down anti-Christian and anti-Hindu rhetoric.

In May 2007 the Punjab Provincial Education Minister agreed to return property taken from two Associate Reformed Presbyterian (ARP) Mission Schools for noneducational use. The Education Minister promised to return 10 primary and secondary schools to ARP's management as quickly as possible.

In early January 2007, two Muslim students at a secular university in Peshawar went to court to stop construction of a Christian church on the grounds of their university. On January 23, 2007, the Peshawar High Court rejected their petition and authorized construction of the church to continue. In their ruling, the justices stated that "Islam guarantees freedom of religion for minorities, there are no legal obstacles to building places of worship, and Pakistan's constitution protects religious minorities."

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

Relations between the country's religious communities remained tense. Violence against religious minorities and between Muslim sects continued. Most believed that a small minority were responsible for attacks; however, discriminatory laws and the teaching of religious intolerance created a permissive environment for attacks. Police often refused to prevent violence and harassment or refused to charge persons who commit such offenses.

Mobs occasionally attacked individuals accused of blasphemy, their family, or their religious community prior to their arrest. When blasphemy and other religious cases were brought to court, extremists often packed the courtroom and made public threats against an acquittal. Religious extremists continued to threaten to kill those acquitted of blasphemy charges. High-profile accused persons often went into hiding or emigrated after acquittal.

On April 8, 2007, local extremists tortured and killed Chaudhry Habibullah Sial, an 82-year old Ahmadi man who was using his home as a prayer center for Ahmadis.

On March 1, 2007, a former police officer killed Mohammed Ashraf, an Ahmadi, because Ashraf changed his religion from Sunni to Ahmadi. The killer claimed to have done nothing wrong and that he followed Islamic law, since apostasy is punishable by death.

In November 2006 two Ahmadi men in Bagar Sargana were attacked by a mob on their way home after Friday prayers.

In October 2006 an Ahmadi imam at a mosque in Chawinda was attacked in his apartment in the mosque complex.

In September 2006 Professor Abdul Basit, an Ahmadi, was attacked in his home in Dera Ghazi Khan.

On August 22, 2006, Munawwar Ahmad Sahib, an Ahmadi, was killed by two gunmen in his home in Gujrat.

In August 2006 an Ahmadi youth, Etzaz Ahmad, was attacked in the shop where he worked as an apprentice. The attacker said he was trying to kill an infidel.

Ahmadi individuals and institutions long have been victims of religious violence, much of which organized religious extremists instigated. Ahmadi leaders charged that in previous years militant Sunni mullahs and their followers staged sometimes violent anti-Ahmadi marches through the streets of Rabwah, a predominantly Ahmadi town and spiritual center in central Punjab. Backed by crowds of between 100 and 200 persons, the mullahs reportedly denounced Ahmadis and their founder, a situation that sometimes led to violence. The Ahmadis claimed that police generally were present during these marches but did not intervene to prevent violence. In contrast with the previous report, there were no such reports during this reporting period.

Violence against and harassment of Christians continued during the period covered by this report. Many Christians, descended from low-cast Hindu ancestors, faced discrimination more for ethnic and social reasons than religious.

On May 7, 2007, several Christian communities in the NWFP received letters allegedly from Muslim fundamentalists claiming that they must convert to Islam within 10 days or face dire consequences, including death and bombings of homes and churches. A teenager admitted to writing the letter as a "prank," and religious leaders accepted his apology.

In April 2007 a Muslim claimed Christian boys took a sticker from his nephew with the name Muhammad on it, threw it on the ground, and trampled it. This enflamed a group of Muslims celebrating the Prophet's birthday, and they attacked the Christians, injuring dozens and badly beating a crippled man.

In April 2007 a 12-year old Christian girl was kidnapped and raped near Lahore on Easter Day. She was held for 4 days before she was returned to her family. Officials would not file a first information report against her four attackers because doctors allegedly refused to provide a medical report.

In January 2007 Voice of the Martyrs-Canada reported that Islamic militants attacked a team of four Christians at a Muslim festival in Pakpattan for distributing Christian tracts.

On December 25, 2006, three Muslim residents in the village of Nanghal Sahdhaan near Lahore attacked a Catholic church and tried to set it on fire. The same men attempted to interrupt a service a week earlier. The priest reported the incident to police, who went to their homes but were unable to locate the men.

In December 2006 a Muslim couple in Sialkot released a mother and daughter they had imprisoned and tortured for 3 months. The couple tried to force them to convert from Christianity to Islam. The mother and daughter refused and

were eventually released with the assistance of the court system.

On November 12, 2006, a mob of drunken Muslims wielding clubs and guns attacked the congregation of the Nazarene Church in the village of Talab Sarai.

In October 2006 a Muslim teacher beat a 15-year old Christian school girl in Kasur because the girl wore a cross to school and forced her to stand outside in the hot sun until she fainted.

In August 2006 police arrested four Muslim men who attacked a group of Christian women and children, destroyed a church with a grenade, and set two nearby houses on fire. Muslim neighbors assisted the women and children and helped drive the attackers away.

In August 2006 a man attacked his niece because she converted to Christianity. She escaped and went into hiding.

On August 7, 2006, bulldozers from a local factory destroyed the Awami Church in the village of Mominpura Thiaki. A local priest complained to the Government, and the factory offered the congregation money to rebuild.

In July 2006 a young Christian woman went into hiding to avoid further physical abuse by her Muslim husband and in-laws for refusing to practice Islam. The woman's older brother had tried to force her to convert to Islam and arranged a marriage in which he told her husband-to-be that she had converted. Her husband beat and raped her daily for 2 months for refusing to read the Qur'an.

Hindus faced societal violence, often directed at their temples, during the period covered by this report. Criminals targeted Hindu businessmen for kidnap, particularly in Karachi. Hindus claimed they were forced to pay ransoms since police did little to recover kidnap victims.

Societal violence against the Sikh community remained comparatively rare.

Ismailis reported that they were the objects of resentment of Sunni Muslims due to their comparative economic well being. Ismailis reported they frequently faced societal pressure to adopt conservative Muslim practices or risk being ostracized socially.

Although there were very few Jewish citizens in the country, anti-Semitic articles were common in the vernacular press.

Some Sunni Muslim groups published literature calling for violence against Ahmadis, Shi'a Muslims, other Sunni sects, and Hindus. Some newspapers frequently published articles that contained derogatory references to religious minorities, especially Ahmadis, Hindus, and Jews. Sermons at mosques frequently railed against religious minorities.

In July 2007 Pakistan Army and security forces launched a military operation against the Red Mosque (Lal Masjid) in Islamabad which resulted in the deaths of 10 security forces and approximately 79 militants, including the mosque's leader. From March through June, militants who took over the mosque and its adjoining girls' madrassah kidnapped brothel owners, policemen and foreign massage parlor workers. Fighting erupted when militants fired upon security forces attempting to cordon off the mosque. The confrontation prompted the government to renew its efforts to curb the teaching of extremism in madrassahs across the country.

In May 2007 Islamic clerics and students at Islamabad's Red Mosque captured and held several policemen hostage for 4 days at a conservative seminary associated with the mosque. The same month, women associated with the seminary kidnapped and held three women accused of running a brothel. In June 2007, extremists from the mosque kidnapped and later released six Chinese workers and two Pakistanis at an acupuncture/massage clinic.

In April 2007 more than 100 Shi'a and Sunnis died and many more were injured in sectarian violence which lasted for 2 weeks. The fighting began in Parachinar and spread throughout the Kurram Tribal Area. At the end of the reporting period, a fragile ceasefire existed between the two groups.

In April 2007 gunmen killed two Shi'a men and their Sunni employer in an episode of sectarian violence in the NWFP. One victim, a lawyer and leader of a local political party, had been receiving threats for several months. The same article reported that between January and March 2007, at least eight Shi'a were killed in sectarian violence in the same city. Following each attack, mobs destroyed markets and kept businesses closed.

In February 2007 Muslim clerics sent death threats to a Catholic bishop and two Muslims in Faisalabad, after attending an interfaith program which promoted social harmony and peace.

In January 2007 during the Shi'a festival of Ashura, at least two suicide bombers attacked Shi'a gatherings and two

rockets were launched at a Shi'a mosque in Bannu. The Christian Science Monitor reported at least 21 were killed and 40 were injured in the attacks, which were suspected to be sectarian in nature.

Discrimination in employment based on religion appeared widespread. Christians had difficulty finding jobs other than those involving menial labor, although Christian activists stated that the situation had improved somewhat in the private sector in recent years.

During the reporting period, the majority of bonded laborers in agriculture and the brick kiln industry sectors were non-Muslim.

Throughout the reporting period, attacks, threats, and violence by Islamic extremists increased across Pakistan, but especially in the NWFP. The origin was perceived to be from the influence of the Taliban coming across the border from neighboring Afghanistan.

In May 2007 Tourism Minister Nilofar Bakhtiar was forced to resign after criticism from hardline Islamic clerics. She was photographed in April 2007 hugging an elderly man after completing a paragliding flight to raise money for charity. The clerics considered her public display of affection to be obscene.

Throughout the reporting period, Islamic extremists attacked shops in the NWFP and FATA which sold local and foreign music and video cassettes. Shop owners were warned prior to attacks to stop selling items considered to be un-Islamic. In at least one case, those arrested were Muslim clerics.

In February 2007 two public high schools for girls in the NWFP received threats of attack unless its female students and teachers began wearing veils and burqas. AsiaNews reported that Islamic extremists gave the schools 1 week to conform with "Islamic norms" or they would be bombed. Both schools were closed.

Between July 2005 and June 2006 Ahmadis and Christians were the primary targets of religious attack in Pakistan. One Ahmadi was killed, and an Islamic cleric refused to allow the remains of an Ahmadi girl to remain in a Muslim graveyard. Christians faced arson attacks upon their churches, and following the publication of cartoons of Mohammed in the Danish press, at least six Christian institutions were attacked, and one pastor was kidnapped and tortured.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

Embassy officers maintained a dialogue with government, religious, and minority community representatives to encourage religious freedom and to discuss the blasphemy laws, the Hudood Ordinances, curriculum reform in the public education and madrassah education systems, treatment of the Ahmadiyya and Christian communities, and sectarian violence. Embassy officials, including the Ambassador, met with leaders from communities of all religious groups and NGOs working on religious freedom problems. Embassy officials also raised and discussed treatment of the Ahmadis with Members of Parliament.

As part of its overall public education reform program, valued at \$100 million (6 billion rupees), the United States provided substantial financial support to the Government's curriculum reform initiative, which included eliminating the teaching of religious intolerance.

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