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Immigration and
Refugee Board of Canada

Commission de l'immigration
et du statut de réfugié du Canada

Pakistan: How Shia Muslims differ from Sunnis; treatment of Shias, particularly in Lahore and Multan; government response to violence against Shia Muslims (2010-December 2013)

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1. Differences Between Shia and Sunni Muslims

Estimates of the Shia Muslim population in Pakistan range from 5 percent (SAIR [2012]) to 20 percent (ibid.; MEMRI 25 Sept. 2012; RFE/RL 18 Feb. 2013).

1.1 Religious Differences

Sources indicate that the split between the Shia and Sunni sects of Islam traces back to a dispute over who would lead the Muslim community after the death of the Prophet Muhammad (BBC 6 Dec. 2011; Pew 9 Aug. 2012b). According to the Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), an independent non-profit research organization (MEMRI 25 Sept. 2012), Sunni Muslims believe that the four caliphs that succeeded the Prophet Muhammad, in order, are Abu Bakr, Omar ibn Khattab, Usman ibn Affan and Ali ibn Abi Talib, with Ali being the last of the four (ibid.). In contrast, the same source explains that Shia claim that the Prophet Muhammad named Ali ibn Abi Talib as his successor and, thus, consider him the first caliph, leading to a different set of successors (ibid.). Similarly, in written correspondence with the Research Directorate, a representative of the Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) said that Sunni follow the four companions (Abu Bakr, Umer, Usman and Ali), whereas Shia only follow one companion (Hazrat Ali), whom they believe Mohammad named as his successor (17 Dec. 2013).

Sources indicate that there are some differences in doctrine between Sunni and Shia Muslims (MEMRI 25 Sept. 2012; BBC 6 Dec. 2011). According to an article by BBC, there are differences in ritual, law, theology and religious organization (ibid.). However, the same sources notes that Sunni and Shia Muslims share many beliefs, such as the "oneness" of Allah and that Muhammad was the last prophet, as well as many practices, such as prayer, fasting, and making a pilgrimage to Mecca (ibid.).

Sources indicate that the Day of Ashura, the tenth day in the Islamic month of Muharram [Moharram], is the main religious activity for Shia (Plus News Pakistan 18 Nov. 2013; US 28 Jan. 2009, 4; IHS Global Insight 19 Nov. 2013). For Shia, Ashura commemorates the martyrdom of Hazrat Imam Hussain at Karbala (Plus News Pakistan 18 Nov. 2013; US 28 Jan. 2009, 4; AHRC 17 Dec. 2013). Sources indicate that Hussain was Ali's son (ibid.; US 28 Jan. 2009, 4). He was reportedly killed by Sunni forces in Karbala [Iraq] in 680 (ibid.), by the armies of the caliph Yazid (AFP 15 Nov. 2013). According to the BBC, both Ali and Hussain were killed in power struggles over who would be the caliph [leader of the Muslims] (BBC 6 Dec. 2011). A report by the US Congressional Research Services (CRS) notes that for Shia, Ashura is a somber occasion and includes a ritual of self-flagellation (US 28 Jan. 2009, 4). The same source explains that Shia religious traditions and practices are reinforced by the Ashura ritual and the moral lessons learned from the martyrdom of Hussein (ibid.).

1.2 Distinguishing Features

Sources indicate that Shia in Pakistan can often be distinguished by their names (MEMRI 17 Dec. 2013; AHRC 17 Dec. 2013; Jinnah Institute 16 Dec. 2013). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, the editorial team of the South Asian Studies Project of MEMRI, noted that common Shia names include Jaffer, Rizvi, Ali, Hussain, Hasan, and Abbas (MEMRI 17 Dec. 2013). The AHRC representative included Sayyed, Raza, Naqvi, Jafery, and Abbas as common Shia names, in conjunction with Hussain and the names of friends of Hussain who were also killed in the battle in Karbala (AHRC 17 Dec. 2013).

Sources indicate that one cannot generally differentiate between Shia and Sunni people in Pakistan by appearance (AHRC 17 Dec. 2013; PhD Candidate 11 Dec. 2013; Jinnah Institute 16 Dec. 2013). The AHRC representative noted that while Sunni and Shia are generally not distinguishable by their dress, many Shia wear black clothes and "display signs of the grave, horse and blood of Hussein" during the month of Muharram (AHRC 17 Dec. 2013). The same source also noted that Shia religious leaders often wear black, while Sunni clerics often wear green or white (ibid.). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a PhD candidate at McGill University, who studies

Islamic law and is also a fellow at the Lahore-based Islamic research foundation al-Mawrid (13 Dec. 2013), noted that Shia scholars are distinguishable from Sunni scholars, with different dress, cloaks and turbans (11 Dec. 2013).

Sources indicate that some Sunnis in Pakistan view Shia as a "heretical" sect of Islam (SAIR [2012]) or as non-Muslims (MEMRI 25 Sept. 2012; Pew 9 Aug. 2012a). According to a 2012 survey by the Washington-based Pew Research Centre, only 50 percent of Sunni Pakistanis surveyed accept Shia followers as Muslims (ibid.).

2. Treatment of Shia Muslims

Several sources indicate that there has been an increase in violent attacks against Shia by militant groups (Jinnah Institute 2013, 19-20; SAIR [2012]; HRCP Mar. 2013, 6). Attacks against Shia reportedly occur in all regions of Pakistan (MEMRI 25 Sept. 2012; SAIR [2012]; HRCP Mar. 2013, 102). Several sources indicate that Shia are particularly targeted in Balochistan province (MEMRI 25 Sept. 2012; HRCP Mar. 2013, 60; Human Rights Watch 5 Sept. 2012), particularly in the city of Quetta (Jinnah Institute 16 Dec. 2013; HRCP Mar. 2013, 102). According to the Hong Kong-based Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), approximately 33 percent of targeted killings of Shia in 2012 occurred in Balochistan (23 Feb. 2013). Sources also report high levels of violence against Shia in:

the city of Karachi (HRCP Mar. 2013, 60; Jinnah Institute 16 Dec. 2013; Human Rights Watch 5 Sept. 2012);

the regions of Gilgit Balistan (Human Rights Watch 5 Sept. 2012; MEMRI 25 Sept. 2012);

Hangu (ibid.)

Parachinar (ibid.; Jinnah Institute 2013, 20)

Dera Ismail Khan (ibid.; MEMRI 25 Sept. 2012;).

Several sources indicate that Hazara Shia in Balochistan have been particularly targeted (ibid.; Jinnah Institute 16 Dec. 2013; HRCP Mar. 2012, 83-84). According to the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), the Hazara, who are almost all Shia, are reportedly a distinct ethnic group with recognizable physical features, making them more easily targeted (HRCP Mar. 2013, 101). According to the Jinnah Institute, an independent public policy think tank and advocacy group focused on human security issues (Jinnah Institute 2013), most Hazara can no longer attend university or college in Quetta city, or have closed their businesses as a result of security fears and targeted attacks (ibid., 24).

In a report to the UN Human Rights Commission, the Society for Threatened Peoples (STP), an NGO with special consultative status, reports that between 2008 and April 2013, approximately 942 Shia were killed in 481 incidents in Pakistan, and that the Hazara remained "prime targets" (23 May 2013, 2). Basing their figures on media reports, the HRCP State of Human Rights in 2012 indicates that in Balochistan, between 2008 and 2012, 758 Shia were killed; of these 338 were Hazara Shias (Mar. 2013, 64). Sources indicate that targeted Shia include "ordinary" Shia (Jinnah Institute 2013, 20; Human Rights Watch 5 Sept. 2012), meaning people who are not high profile individuals or involved in sectarian politics (Jinnah Institute 2013, 19, 20).

According to the Jinnah Institute report on extremism in Pakistan Extremism Watch, there were 203 Shia killed in 2011 and 450 killed between 1 January 2012 and 30 November 2012 (ibid., 19). According to the South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP) there were 136 Shia killed in 2011 and 396 killed in targeted attacks in 2012 (2013). According to HRCP, in 2012, 531 people were killed in sectarian violence across Pakistan, the majority of whom were Shia (Mar. 2013, 62-63). At least

325 Shia Muslims were killed in targeted attacks in 2012, according to an article by the AHRC (23 Feb. 2013). According to Human Rights Watch, approximately 400 Shia were killed between 1 Jan. and 11 Nov. 2013 (11 Nov. 2013).

Sources report that attacks against Shia occur particularly during Ashura (Jinnah Institute 2012, 23; Human Rights Watch 11 Nov. 2013). According to Human Rights Watch, 30 people were killed and at least 100 were wounded in 5 attacks during Ashura in 2012, reportedly by Sunni extremist groups (ibid.). According to the Jinnah Institute, approximately 40 Shia were killed in the first ten days of Muharram in 2012, when at least 8 mourning processions or gatherings were bombed (2013, 19).

Shia have been attacked in multiple ways, including:

motorbike-riding assailants (MEMRI 17 Dec. 2013; Human Rights Watch 5 Sept. 2012)

drive-by shootings (US Apr. 2013, 121; HRCP Mar. 2013, 102)

militants stopping buses and killing Shia (ibid.; MEMRI 17 Dec. 2013; US Apr. 2013, 121) who are identified by their names on their ID cards (ibid.; MEMRI 17 Dec. 2013)

targeting buses of Shia pilgrims en route to Iran (Dawn 31 Dec. 2012; Daily Times 31 Dec. 2012; Jinnah Institute 2012, 13)

bombing Shia religious gatherings (MEMRI 17 Dec. 2013; HRCP Mar. 2013, 102)

attacking Shia processions (US Apr. 2013, 120; Jinnah Institute 2012, 12)

targeting Shia mosques and other religious buildings (US Apr. 2013, 120; Jinnah Institute 2012, 12; HRCP Mar. 2013, 102)

suicide bombings (US July 2013, 120; Jinnah Institute 2012, 12; HRCP Mar. 2013, 102)

2.1 Treatment of Shia in Lahore and Multan

Sources indicate that Lahore and Multan, in Punjab province, have large Shia communities (Jinnah Institute 16 Dec. 2013; HRCP 13 Dec. 2013). According to the media source IHS Global Insight, both Lahore and Multan are among the urban areas where Shia and Sunni live in close proximity to each other (19 Nov. 2013).

2.1.1 Violence

According to the editorial team of the South Asia Studies Project of MEMRI, the situation for Shia Muslims in Lahore and Multan is "extremely serious" (MEMRI 17 Dec. 2013). The same source stated that there have been "numerous killings" of Shia in these cities and that "[l]ike elsewhere in Pakistan, Shia Muslims are being systematically targeted and shot dead by Sunni militants who do not consider them as Muslims" (ibid.). In a telephone interview with the Research Directorate, a representative from the Jinnah Institute stated that, while there is less violence against Shia in these areas by comparison to Quetta and Karachi, both Lahore and Multan are affected by "a new level of extremism in Punjab province" (Jinnah Institute 16 Dec. 2013). He said that there have been violent attacks and targeted killings in both cities (ibid.). He described Lahore as a "new flashpoint" for sectarian violence against Shia and noted an increase in the number of Shia being targeted there (ibid.). The AHRC representative said that the situation in Lahore and Multan is "no different" than other areas of Pakistan in terms of the lack of safety and protection for Shia (17 Dec. 2013).

The representative of the HRCP, while corroborating that there have been targeted killings against Shia in Lahore and Multan, expressed the opinion that the problem is not "severe" for Shia in these cities (HRCP 13 Dec. 2013). Similarly, the PhD candidate described Lahore and Multan as "relatively more educated cities" and said that they do not have the same level of "sectarian violence or hatred" as other "remote" areas of Pakistan (PhD Candidate 11 Dec. 2013). He expressed the opinion that while there may be "sectarian tensions" in Lahore and Multan, that sectarian violence and extremism is not part of the beliefs of mainstream society in these cities (ibid.).

Sources indicate that Shia who are particularly targeted in these cities include community leaders (AHRC 17 Dec. 2013) and people in prominent positions (Jinnah Institute 16 Dec. 2013). Examples of Shia professionals targeted include:

doctors and lawyers (AHRC 17 Dec. 2013; Jinnah Institute 16 Dec. 2013)

judges, teachers, journalists (AHRC 17 Dec. 2013)

bankers, clerics, company CEOs, police officers (Jinnah Institute 16 Dec. 2013)

Sources indicate that other Shia are also being targeted and killed in these cities (MEMRI 17 Dec. 2013; Jinnah Institute 16 Dec. 2013), such as shopkeepers or people attending Shia mosques or processions (ibid.). The MEMRI team noted that only killings of prominent Shia are reported in the media (17 Dec. 2013).

Sources report the following incidents of violence against Shia in Lahore:

The Jinnah Insitute reports that on September 2010, there was a suicide attack on the Yaum-e-Ali procession in Lahore; 30 people were killed and 300 were injured (2012, 12). AHRC also reported on an attack on a September 2010 Shia procession killing at least 35 and injuring 160 people (8 Feb. 2012).

In January 2011, a Shia Chehlum procession in Lahore was targeted (AHRC 8 Feb. 2012; Rediff 26 Jan. 2011; HRCP Mar. 2012, 83). According to the Mumbai-based media source Rediff, 13 people were killed and 70 people were injured (Rediff 26 Jan. 2011).

On 24 May 2012, the nephew of the president of a Shia rights organization was the victim of a targeted killing by terrorists (US July 2013, 13).

On 23 June 2012, a Shia Muslim was shot dead at his doorstep in Lahore (MEMRI 25 Sept. 2012).

On 12 February 2013, a Shia banker was shot and killed by militants (AHRC 2013, 19).

On 18 February 2013, a prominent ophthalmologist, and his son [11 years old (ibid., 18)] were shot in a targeted killing when the doctor dropped off his son at school (US July 2013, 5).

On 1 August 2013, "terrorists" decapitated a Shia in Lahore and videotaped the incident (AHRC 2013, 5).

On 1 October 2013 a Shia was killed by the militant group Sipah-e-Sahaba (SSP) (ibid., 2).

On 15 December 2013, a Shia cleric was shot dead by militants in Lahore (MEMRI 17 Dec. 2013; Jinnah Institute 16 Dec. 2013).

Media sources report that there was sectarian violence in Multan following attacks that occurred on 15 November in the city of Rawalpindi that killed at least nine people (IHS Global Insight 19 Nov. 2013; Pakistan Observer 17 Nov. 2013; Pakistan Today 17 Nov. 2013). The army was

reportedly sent to Multan to quell sectarian clashes (AFP 16 Nov. 2013; Pakistan Observer 17 Nov. 2013; Pakistan Today 17 Nov. 2013). Some sources report that twelve people were injured in the clashes resulting from protests in Multan, but the sources did not specify whether the victims were Shia or Sunni (Pakistan Observer 17 Nov. 2013; AFP 16 Nov. 2013). According to the Pakistani newspaper Dawn, at least 25 people were injured in Multan during the "riots," including 7 people with bullet injuries and 3 policemen (17 Nov. 2013).

According to the AHRC representative, there have been some attacks against Shia in Multan, including an attack on an Imam Bargah, which is a sacred place for Shia (AHRC 17 Dec. 2013). An article by Shiite News, a news portal reporting on Shia news around the world, indicates that the Imam Bargah in Multan was attacked on 16 November 2013 by armed "terrorists" of the outlawed Sipah-e-Sahaba, who hit the gate of the building with batons and sticks (Shiite News 16 Nov. 2013). The article did not report whether there were any deaths or injuries (ibid.).

Media sources report that Shia from Lahore and Multan were among those killed in violent attacks targeting Shia pilgrims en route to Iran (Dawn 31 Dec. 2012; Daily Times 31 Dec. 2013; Daily the Post 31 Dec. 2012).

2.1.2 Hate Speech, Discrimination and Threats

The AHRC representative said there is "hatred" of Shia and they face discrimination (17 Dec. 2013). According to MEMRI, many Sunni clerics preach hatred, prejudice and violence against Shia (MEMRI 25 Sept. 2012). MEMRI notes that some militant Sunni groups, particularly the Lashkar-e Jhangvi (LeJ), use social networking sites, such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to foster violence against Shia (ibid.).

According to the AHRC representative, Lahore is the "epicentre" of the Pakistani Taliban and the Lashkar-e Jhangvi (LeJ) (AHRC 17 Dec. 2013). Similarly, the Jinnah Institute representative said there is a large population of militants in Lahore (Jinnah Institute 16 Dec. 2013).

According to the Jinnah Institute representative, it is an "everyday occurrence" for Shia to receive threats and/or face harassment in these cities. He said:

Based on anecdotal evidence, Shia have been receiving threats in a variety of forms--texts, phone calls, letters. Threats against Shia are common, growing and quite frequent in both Lahore and Multan." (ibid.)

The AHRC representative corroborated that it is "very common" for Shia in Lahore and Multan to receive threats and to be subject to verbal abuse (17 Dec. 2013).

3. Militant Groups

Sources indicate that the Lashkar-e Jhangvi (LeJ) is one of the militant groups responsible for violence against Shia in Lahore and Multan (AHRC 17 Dec. 2013; Jinnah Institute 2012, 20). The LeJ is a banned group (AHRC 17 Dec. 2013; Jinnah Institute 2012, 21; HRCP Mar. 2013, 63) and was an off-shoot of Sipah-e-Sahaba, also a banned Sunni militant organization (Jinnah Institute 2012, 20). LeJ has reportedly proclaimed its goal of "'cleansing'" Pakistan of Shia (US Apr. 2013, 121; RFE/RL 18 Feb. 2013). According to the HRCP annual report, State of Human Rights in 2012, the LeJ has claimed responsibility for most of the attacks against Shia in Pakistan (Mar. 2013, 63). LeJ has its base in Punjab province (RFE/RL 18 Feb. 2013).

Sources report that the LeJ changed its name after it was banned and now operates as the political group Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat (ASWJ) (Jinnah Institute 2013, 19; AHRC 17 Dec. 2013). The representative of the AHRC notes that the group Lashkare Taiba of Hafiz Saeed is also responsible for some violence against Shia in Lahore and Multan (ibid.).

According to Human Rights Watch, LeJ has had links to the Pakistani military and intelligence services and acts with impunity in areas where state authority is well-established, such as Punjab province (Human Rights Watch 11 Nov. 2013). Other sources also note that the Pakistani intelligence maintains relationships with these banned militant groups (US Apr. 2013, 121; AHRC 21 Sept. 2011), including the LeJ in Punjab (ibid.).

4. State Protection

4.1 Government Efforts

Several sources state that government efforts to address violence against Shia have not been sufficient (Jinnah Institute 2013, 23; US Apr. 2013, 119; AHRC 8 Feb. 2012). In their annual report for 2012, the US Commission on International Religious Freedom describes the response of the Pakistani government to violent attacks against Shia as "grossly inadequate" (US Apr. 2013, 120). Similarly, the Jinnah Institute said there is a "lack of political will" to address violence against Shia (Jinnah Institute 2013, 23). The Jinnah Institute representative stated that there is "no protection against targeted killings" of Shia and that the Pakistani government "generally has not done much, does not take responsibility, and seems unwilling to take action" (ibid. 16 Dec. 2013). Similarly the AHRC reported that "[t]he State's machinery has either refused or failed to protect Shias and other religious minorities in Pakistan" (AHRC 8 Feb. 2012). The AHRC representative explained that "[t]he government does not appear to be doing anything for the protection [of] the Shia religious community except providing some security at the processions and at the religious places, which are mostly insufficient" (ibid. 17 Dec. 2013).

Media sources report cases in which the state has provided police support to strengthen security in Lahore and Multan during times of sectarian tension (Dawn 17 Nov. 2013; Plus News Pakistan 18 Nov. 2013; Rediff 26 Jan. 2011). For example, Plus News Pakistan notes that during the Ashura procession in November 2013, security arrangements in Lahore included the suspension of mobile phone services, blocking off the procession route and only allowing mourners to enter after security personnel checked ID cards (Plus News Pakistan 18 Nov. 2013). In addition, security measures included a special police squad ahead of the procession and monitoring by army helicopters (ibid.).

The HRCP reports that following several attacks against Shia pilgrims travelling through Balochistan in 2011, authorities required pilgrims to obtain permission prior to travelling through the province en route to Iran (HRCP Mar. 2013, 93). However, the same source notes that official escorts of Shia convoys travelling through the province only afforded the pilgrims "partial security" and they continued to be targeted in 2012 (ibid.).

Several sources state that militants targeting Shia Muslims act with "impunity" (US Apr. 2013, 120; Jinnah Institute 2013, 19; Human Rights Watch 5 Sept. 2012). According to the AHRC, the government has provided "safe shelters" for Sunni militant groups and the ruling party has made alliances with members of the ASWJ party (AHRC 17 Dec. 2013). Similarly, the MEMRI team expressed the view that the government of Punjab province, "promises religious harmony but is effectively shielding the culprits" (MEMRI 17 Dec. 2013). The same source expressed the view that the provincial government "received electoral support from the SSPASWJ-LeJ" (ibid.). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response. Senior army officials interviewed by the Jinnah Institute said that the army, which is responsible for leading counter-terrorism efforts, maintains a "hands off policy towards sectarian conflicts" (Jinnah Institute 2013, 20).

4.2 Police and Judiciary

The MEMRI team noted that the government does not act against powerful sectarian organizations, which also prevents the police and judiciary from acting against them (17 Dec.

2013). According to the Jinnah Institute, "no concrete steps have been taken to investigate the attacks [against Shia]" (2013, 20).

According to MEMRI, the Punjab police are under the influence of "anti-Shia Islamic forces" (Dec. 2013). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

Several sources indicate that no one has been punished for violent attacks against Shia (Human Rights Watch 5 Sept. 2012; AHRC 17 Dec. 2013; Jinnah Institute 16 Dec. 2013). According to Human Rights Watch, since 2008, "only a handful" of suspects have been charged in attacks against Shia, but none were punished (5 Sept. 2012). According to the Jinnah Institute, the LeJ leader, Malik Ishaq, was apprehended but was released from detention in January 2012 "for lack of evidence" (2013, 22). According to the HRCP, no perpetrators were apprehended for any of the main sectarian attacks in 2012 (Mar. 2013, 101).

The AHRC representative explained:

There is not a single case [of Shia killings] in which the police have made any effective investigation. Not a single person has been punished because of the poor prosecution and the judges are afraid of giving sentences to the militants. (17 Dec. 2013)

Similarly, the Jinnah Institute representative said:

In terms of targeted killings of Shia by militants, the police and courts are not able to provide a solution. Nobody has been convicted or tried for extra-judicial killings of Shia. The police and courts lack capacity to take on the terrorists, who are in banned groups. They may register the case, but the courts do not come into play. There are currently anti-terrorism courts, but sectarian killings are seldom taken up by these courts. (16 Dec. 2013)

According to the USCIRF annual report for 2012, the state does not adequately protect religious minorities, in part, due to "endemic corruption, ineffectiveness, and a general lack of accountability" within the police and judiciary (US Apr. 2013, 119). Similarly, the Jinnah Institute states that "[d]efective investigations, poorly documented cases, intimidation of investigators, lawyers and judges have all contributed to the poor conviction rate in cases related to Shia killings" (2013, 23).

According to the AHRC representative, the police cannot provide protection to Shia who receive threats and do not file reports based on threats (AHRC 17 Dec. 2013). On this topic, the Jinnah Institute representative explained:

In terms of threats, reporting the threats to the police could make the victim more vulnerable. Some police have anti-Shia sentiments and it is hard to know whether the police will act as a friend. A lot of militant organizations have power, and the police may report the victim's complaints to the militants. Police are also targeted by militants, so often police do not want to get involved. (Jinnah Institute 16 Dec. 2013)

The AHRC representative noted that Shia police officers face discrimination "on the instructions of militants" (AHRC 17 Dec. 2013).

In terms of the overall policing situation in Lahore and Multan, the Jinnah Institute representative stated:

Policing tends to be better in Lahore than some other Pakistani cities. However, it is a large city and the situation varies depending on the part of the city. Multan is more run down and under-resourced and offers less protection than Lahore. (16 Dec. 2013)

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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