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2022 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.” The penal code sets punishments for blasphemy that range from 10 years in prison to the death penalty. It also states, “A person of the Qadiani group or the Lahori group (who call themselves Ahmadis) is a non-Muslim.” The constitution and penal code also prohibit Ahmadis from acting as Muslims. Speech or action intended to incite religious hatred is punishable by up to seven years in prison.

According to media reports, police at times killed, physically abused, or failed to protect members of religious minorities. The courts continued to enforce blasphemy laws, punishment for which ranged up to the death penalty, although the government has never executed anyone for blasphemy. According to civil society organizations, at least 52 persons were accused of blasphemy or related religion-based criminal charges during the year, the majority of whom were Ahmadi Muslims. According to civil society reports, at least four individuals charged with blasphemy during previous years received death sentences in 2022, two Christians and two Muslims. In one of those cases, a judge converted a life sentence for blasphemy to a death sentence. In other cases, courts overturned some blasphemy convictions upon appeal and acquitted or granted bail to individuals who had spent years in prison on blasphemy charges. According to nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), police failed to protect people accused of blasphemy, although in one instance, police prevented an individual from being lynched for alleged blasphemy. In August, the Ministry of the Interior ordered the Punjab provincial government to take action against the Center for Social Justice (CSJ), an NGO, for a report it and other NGOs submitted to the UN Human Rights Council that described incidents of forced conversion of Christians and misuse of the country’s laws against blasphemy in violation of international human rights obligations and the country’s own laws. The government considered the NGO report “anti-government propaganda,” according to the media. In October, the government announced the creation of a dedicated unit to investigate and handle blasphemy allegations online and on social media like other cybercrimes. In November, local police in Chiniot, Punjab, in coordination with the Federal Investigative Agency (FIA) Cyber Crime Wing, charged the national spokesperson for the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community of Pakistan under blasphemy laws and attempted to arrest him in Rabwah, Punjab. The UN special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief

said the country's blasphemy laws were a violation of human rights and religious freedom. NGOs active on religious freedom issues reported harassment by government authorities.

Ahmadiyya community leaders continued to report they were affected by discriminatory and ambiguous legislation and court judgments that denied them basic rights, including issuance of national identification cards, driver's licenses, and passports. The Ahmadiyya community reported that police registered 49 cases against Ahmadi Muslims under these laws during the year, the majority of which were for "pretending to be Muslims." Ahmadi Muslims also remained barred from representation on the National Commission for Minorities within the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

NGOs expressed concern that authorities often failed to intervene in instances of societal violence against religious minorities due to fear of retaliation, inadequate staff, or apathy and that perpetrators of such abuses 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. Throughout the year, some government officials and politicians engaged in anti-Ahmadi rhetoric and attended events that Ahmadi Muslims said incited violence against their community. In December, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said the government would protect the rights of all religious minorities and ensure them a safe environment, and authorities continued military and law enforcement operations against violent groups. According to Ahmadi civil society groups, however, the government failed to restrict advertisements or speeches inciting anti-Ahmadi violence, as provided in the National Action Plan against terrorism.

Throughout the year, unidentified individuals and mobs targeted and killed Christians, Hindus, Sikhs, Ahmadi Muslims, Sunni Muslims, and Shia Muslims in attacks believed to be motivated by religion or accusations of blasphemy, or described as religion-based, according to some faith leaders. According to the NGO website South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP), the number of sectarian attacks and killings by armed groups increased slightly compared with 2021, reversing the overall decline in terrorist attacks reported in previous years.

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 the increasing frequency of attempts to kidnap, forcibly convert, and forcibly marry young women and girls from religious minority communities, especially Hindus and Christians. Estimates of the number of forced or coerced conversions vary widely – from as few as five per year to as many as 500. The NGO Center for Social Justice recorded 124 cases of forced or coerced conversions of young women and girls through marriage during the year, an increase of 59 percent over the organization's count of 78 cases in the previous year. There continued to be reports of attacks on Ahmadi, Hindu, and Christian holy places, cemeteries, and religious symbols. Civil society groups and some religious leaders continued to express concerns about the safety of religious minorities.

Senior U.S. Department of State officials, including the Counselor of the Department of State, the Ambassador, and Consuls General, as well as other U.S. embassy officers, met with government officials, including senior advisors to the Prime Minister, officials from the Ministries of Law and Justice and Foreign Affairs and senior members of the Senate and National Assembly to urge them to make progress on religious freedom issues. These included blasphemy laws, laws concerning Ahmadi Muslims, protecting all religious minorities, sectarian relations, and interfaith respect. In September the Ambassador met with interfaith leaders at Badshahi Mosque to promote peaceful religious

coexistence. The Ambassador highlighted the U.S. government's commitment to religious freedom and discussed efforts in the country to improve interfaith tolerance, inclusion, and harmony. In September, the Counselor of the Department of State visited Jamia Islamia Clifton Madrassah in Karachi, where he was joined by the Karachi Administrator and an interfaith group of local religious leaders with whom he discussed how flood assistance packages would directly aid the people of the province, including minority religious communities.

Embassy and consulate general officers continued to engage civil society leaders, local religious leaders, religious minority group representatives, and legal experts to discuss ways to combat intolerance and promote interfaith cooperation to increase religious freedom. The embassy and consulates general highlighted the principles of religious freedom and examples of interfaith dialogue in the United States on their social media platforms and organized several outreach events throughout the year.

On November 30, 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 in the national interest of the United States.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 242.9 million (midyear 2022). According to the results of the most recent 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; 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 Muslims, including ethnic Hazara, Ismaili, and Bohra (a branch of Ismaili), are generally believed to make up 15 to 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 census results, the population is 1.6 percent Hindu, 1.6 percent Christian, 0.2 percent Ahmadi Muslim, and 0.3 percent others, to include Baha'is, Sikhs, and Parsis. Taking into account the Ahmadi boycott of the official census, however, community sources put the number of Ahmadi Muslims at approximately 500,000 to 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 results of the 2017 census and say the numbers underrepresent their true population and their political influence because minority seat allocation in the national and provincial parliaments is based on census figures.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal Framework

The constitution establishes Islam as the state religion but provides, "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 punishment for persons convicted of blasphemy includes 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 of imprisonment. Under the law, 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 for possible removal or to 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, 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, the amount of which is at the discretion of the sentencing judge.

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

The government may use the antiterrorism courts, established as a parallel legal structure under antiterrorism legislation, 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 that 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 that 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. Shia and Ahmadi Muslim communities run their own charity programs.

The constitution mandates that 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 Ahmadi religious literature.

The provincial and federal governments have legal responsibility for certain minority religious properties abandoned during the 1947 partition of British India. The federal government supervises and controls both religious and secular properties abandoned during partition via the Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETPB). ETPB holds in trust some 200 Sikh gurdwaras and 150 Hindu temples across the country. The Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (PSGPC) is responsible for maintaining gurdwaras.

The constitution states that 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 that 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 schools, but students of other religious groups are not legally required to study Islam. Most schools do not offer parallel studies in religious beliefs other than Islam or their own respective religious tradition. In some state-run 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, Balochistan, 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 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 and to register with one of the 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 that no law shall be enacted that is "repugnant" to Islam. The constitution states this requirement shall not affect the "personal laws of non-Muslim citizens" or their status as citizens.

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 FSC. The constitution also grants the FSC “revisional jurisdiction” (the power to review of its own accord) over 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. 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 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.”

There is no specific language in the law authorizing civil or common law marriage; religious authorities sign marriage certificates, which are registered with the local marriage registrar. The provincial-level Sindh Hindu Marriage Act and the national-level Hindu Marriage Act (applying to federal territory and all other provinces) codify 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 Hindu Marriage Acts allow marriages to be voided when consent “was obtained by force, coercion, or by fraud.” The acts allow for the termination of the marriage upon the conversion of one party to a religion other than Hinduism. The Sindh provincial government has 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 Sindh Hindu Marriage Act also applies to Sikh marriages. The Punjab Sikh Anand Karaj Marriage Act allows local government officials in that province 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.

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 for 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 laws and review and propose legislation. It has quasi-judicial powers and may refer cases for prosecution but does not have arrest authority. A constitutional amendment devolves responsibility for minorities’ affairs, including religious minorities, to the provinces.

The constitution provides 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 (primarily Hindus, Christians, Sikhs, Kalash and Parsis but excluding Shia and Ahmadi Muslims) at the federal and provincial levels of government. The constitution prohibits discriminatory admission based on religious affiliation to any public educational institution. According to regulations, the only factors affecting admission to public schools are students' grades and home provinces, although 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 Muhammad is the final prophet, which is contrary to Ahmadi beliefs. 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. There is a 2 percent minimum admissions quota for religious minority students in public technical, professional, and higher education institutions in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces.

The National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) designates religious affiliation on passports and requires religious information on national identity card and passport applications. Those wishing to be listed as Muslims must swear they believe Muhammad is the final prophet and must denounce the Ahmadi 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 Muslim. All senior officials, including members of Parliament, must swear an oath to protect the country's Islamic identity. The law requires elected Muslim officials to swear an oath affirming their belief that the Prophet Muhammad is the final prophet of Islam. This requirement prohibits Ahmadi Muslims from holding elected office, as they recognize a prophet subsequent to the Prophet Muhammad.

The constitution reserves seats for non-Muslim members in Parliament and provincial assemblies. The 342-member National Assembly (the lower house of Parliament) has 10 reserved seats for non-Muslims. The 100-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. Reserved seats are distributed to political parties in proportion to the number of seats the parties win in the general electorate. Party leaders choose the minority individuals who hold these seats; they are not elected directly by the minority constituencies they represent. There is no obligation to appoint members to the reserved seats in proportion to their community's share of the population.

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 media reports, police at times killed, physically abused, or failed to protect members of religious minorities. In one case, on September 17, Bashir Masih, a Christian bus driver, was arrested by police in Zafarwali village and taken to the police station in Sambrial, Punjab, on charges of theft. Media reported that his former employer accused Masih of stealing a vehicle. Several hours later, his body was left in the nearby Sambrial hospital, listed as having no next-of-kin, despite multiple visits by his wife, Rozeena Bibi, to the police station earlier that day to inquire after his whereabouts and well-being. On September 18, after local residents protested and district police officer Faisal Kamran intervened, Rozeena Bibi was allowed to file a police complaint. Assistant Sub-Inspector Ghulam Murtaza and Constable Azmat Ali were later arrested for killing Masih. There was no further information available on this case at year's end. Following Masih's death, Catholic leaders called for reforms to end deaths in police custody. On September 27, Kashif Aslam, Deputy Director of the Catholic Bishops' National Commission for Justice and Peace, said, "Law enforcement agencies must shift away from inhumane methods of investigation and extraction of confessions through torture, arbitrary arrests, and detention."

In another case, on September 8, a Muslim police officer named Qadir beat Alam Kohli, a Hindu man from Hyderabad, Sindh, stripped him naked, and chased him until he fell into a septic well and died. Qadir and Kohli reportedly had a verbal confrontation outside the hospital where Qadir was on-duty before closed-circuit television camera captured the police officer beating Kohli and pursuing him until he fell to his death. The victim's family filed a complaint against Qadir, saying Kohli was thrown into the well or forced into it as he fled his attacker. Media outlets reported that police did not investigate the case, calling it a suicide.

On March 16, officers from the FIA's Cyber Crimes Wing in Gujranwala, Punjab, arrested Pakistan Railways employee Fansan Shahid, a Christian, on charges of blasphemy and beat him to elicit a confession, according to his wife. Media said the investigation report filed against Shahid was based on a complaint by a Muslim cleric that Shahid had insulted the Prophet Muhammad in a 2019 comment on Facebook. Police charged Shahid under penal codes Section 295-A, which carries a sentence up to 10 years in prison, and 295-C, which carries a mandatory death sentence. He was also charged under Section 11 of the Pakistan Electronic Crimes Act 2016 (PECA) and Section 153-A of the penal code, which relate to hate speech and are punishable by imprisonment up to seven years and fine. Shahid's wife said he was beaten by the police during his arrest and that when she visited her husband in custody on March 17, he told her officers tortured him into confessing. His attorney said the confession was invalid because it was not obtained in the presence of a magistrate or a judge. Shahid remained in custody pending trial at year's end. Bishop Azad Marshall of the Church of Pakistan condemned Shahid's arrest and the government's failure to combat false allegations of blasphemy, stating, "The government's failure to curb the misuse of the blasphemy laws is emboldening false accusers."

Also in March, media reported that a local jirga (council) and police in Rohri, Sindh, pressured a Hindu family to accept a financial settlement and withdraw murder charges against a Muslim man from an influential local family who killed one of their daughters in an attempt to force her to marry him. The family later fled their village for fear of their other daughter's safety.

On August 2, a court in Mithi acquitted all the accused in the 2021 murder of Hindu laborer Dodo Bheel after a compromise was reached with the victim's family under the *díyat* law, an Islamic legal concept whereby the family can pardon the accused after receiving restitution, usually in the form of "blood money." Under the compromise, which human rights groups said was forced upon Bheel's

family, the accused paid 5 million rupees (\$23,000) in exchange for the family asking the court to drop the charges.

President Arif Alvi signed the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention and Punishment) Law, 2022 into effect on November 2. The law criminalized the torture, rape, and killing of persons in the custody of police and other public officials. Under the law, any public official who committed, abetted, or conspired to commit torture that resulted in death could face penalties up to and including death. This was the first federal legislation that specifically sought to prevent and punish torture by government officials. It empowered the FIA to investigate allegations of custodial torture, including allegations against provincial police departments and the military, and required agencies to suspend or transfer accused officials pending the outcome of an investigation. The National Assembly passed the bill on August 1 and the Senate approved it on October 20. Civil society representatives suggested that the law might benefit minorities in detention, but it was too early to assess the law's impact at the end of the year. They doubted the law's effectiveness without accompanying police reforms.

Civil society representatives reported authorities charged at least 52 individuals in 2022 with blasphemy or related religion-based criminal charges, compared with the 84 reported in 2021. Exact figures were not available, but at least two Christians, one Hindu, and 49 Ahmadis, along with an unknown number of Sunni and Shia Muslims, were charged. At least four persons who had been charged previously, two Christian and two Muslim, received death sentences for blasphemy during the year, but none were carried out. According to a report by the NGO CSJ published in February, *Human Rights Observer 2022*, at least 1,949 individuals were accused of offenses related to religion between 1987 and 2021, mostly under the portion of the penal code dealing with blasphemy and the anti-Ahmadi laws, Sections 295-B, 295-C, 298, 298-A, 298-B, and 298-C. The highest number of accused (47.6 percent) were Sunni and Shia Muslims, followed by Ahmadi Muslims (32.9 percent), Christians (14.4 percent), Hindus (2.1 percent), and others of unknown religion (2.8 percent). NGOs agreed the actual number of blasphemy cases was likely higher, but uneven reporting and lack of media coverage in many areas made it difficult to identify an exact number. The government has not executed anyone for blasphemy, as the higher courts have generally overturned on appeal the convictions or reduced the sentences of those sentenced to death for blasphemy. Often, however, the accused spent many years of incarceration awaiting execution before their death sentences were overturned.

Of those who received death sentences in 2022, on January 3, Judge Sahibzada Naqeeb converted the sentence of Zafar Bhatti, a Christian in jail since 2012 and convicted of blasphemy in 2017, from life in prison to death. The judge argued that the "new" text of Section 295-C of the penal code, which covers blasphemy (and which was updated by a ruling of the FSC in 1990), included only the death penalty as punishment, without the option for a life sentence. Bhatti appealed the decision to the Lahore High Court and remained in custody at year's end.

On January 19, a Rawalpindi court sentenced a Muslim woman, Aneeqa Ateeq, to death over caricatures, remarks, and posts she made on WhatsApp and Facebook that were deemed insulting to the Prophet Muhammad. Ateeq denied the blasphemy charges and told the court that the complainant deliberately dragged her into religious discussions to collect "blasphemy" evidence against her after she refused "to be friendly with him." At year's end, she remained in custody while awaiting an appeal against her conviction.

On February 23, a court in Faisalabad, Punjab sentenced Shia Muslim Wasim Abbas to death on charges of insulting the Prophet. The court also imposed a fine of 500,000 rupees (\$2,200). Abbas was arrested in June 2020 by police in Faisalabad's Factory Area based on a complaint alleging he had

insulted the Prophet Muhammad and his companions. Abbas is the brother of Taimoor Raza, who was sentenced to death for blasphemy in 2017 after engaging in a sectarian debate with a police officer on Facebook. Abbas and Raza remained in custody at year's end.

On July 4, a Lahore court sentenced a Christian bicycle mechanic, Ashfaq Masih, to death for allegedly stating that Jesus Christ was the "only true prophet," which the court interpreted as a blasphemous insult against the Prophet Muhammad. Masih, jailed on the charges since 2017, denied committing blasphemy and claimed that his landlord and a rival business owner encouraged his accuser to instigate a blasphemy case against him for personal and financial reasons. Masih remained in custody at year's end.

In cases not involving the death penalty, on February 7, a court in Sukkur, Sindh, sentenced Notan Lal, a Hindu teacher from Ghotki, Sindh, to life imprisonment, hard labor, and a 50,000 rupee (\$220) fine for blasphemy. Lal, a teacher at a public college and owner of a private school, was imprisoned in 2019 when a 15-year-old Muslim student accused him of insulting Prophet Muhammad during an Islamic studies class. Media outlets reported that the student later recanted the accusation and admitted to fabricating the incident after the teacher had publicly scolded him for not memorizing his lessons. Lal appealed the verdict to the Sindh High Court, but the court had not acted on the case by year's end.

On May 1, authorities opened an investigation into more than 150 leaders and members of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party for alleged blasphemy. The allegations stemmed from an incident in which PTI supporters on a pilgrimage to Saudi Arabia heckled Prime Minister Sharif as he led a delegation to the Mosque of the Prophet in Medina. The independent Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), which is an NGO separate from the government-funded NCHR, called for the cases to be dropped and criticized the government for allowing blasphemy allegations to be "weaponized against its rivals." On May 12, the Islamabad High Court (IHC) directed police not to file formal blasphemy charges, effectively putting an end to the investigation. IHC Chief Justice Athar Minallah stated the facts of the case did not meet the elements of blasphemy and, citing the lynchings of Mashal Khan in 2017 and Priyantha Kumara in 2021, stated innocent lives had been lost due to the misuse of religion in the recent past.

As reported by civil society, on November 8, police in Chiniot, Punjab, in coordination with the FIA Cyber Crime Wing, entered the headquarters of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community of Pakistan in Rabwah and attempted to arrest Saleem ud Din, the national spokesperson for the community, based on a 2020 case filed by the FIA for violating laws against sharing prohibited or blasphemous material online, inciting religious hatred, and insulting religious feelings. The case remained pending before the Lahore High Court and Saleem ud Din remained free at the end of the year.

Other blasphemy cases continued without resolution. Several individuals were accused of spreading blasphemous content through social media under PECA. In November, a group of Ahmadi Muslims charged under PECA in 2019 for publishing copies of the Quran appeared before the Lahore High Court. The petition against them was filed by Muhammad Hassan Muawiyah, brother of Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Religious Affairs and the Middle East Tahir Ashrafi. Muawiyah said that the Ahmadi community and non-Muslims were not authorized to publish copies of the Quran. The criminal case against the accused Ahmadis remained ongoing at year's end, with the accused free on bail.

During the November hearing, the judge ordered police authorities to submit a report stating why they had not enforced the 2019 verdict to ensure that only "authorized entities" published the Quran

and why they had not acted against the accused and those publishing “unauthentic” copies of the Quran. The Lahore High Court summoned the principal secretaries to the Prime Minister and Chief Minister of Punjab to appear on December 7 to explain why the court’s 2019 verdict had not been enforced. Both officials told the court their respective governments would take action to prevent the publication of unauthorized Qurans.

The trial of the killers of Tahir Naseem, a U.S. citizen killed in a courtroom in 2020 while on trial for blasphemy because he was perceived to be an Ahmadi Muslim, was ongoing before the Antiterrorism Court in Peshawar at year’s end.

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, and Junaid Hafeez, remained in prison awaiting action on their appeals. In all the cases, judges continued to delay hearings, adjourn hearings without hearing arguments, or sent appeals to other judicial benches. Civil society and legal sources said lower court judges, who had little or no security protection, were generally hesitant to decide blasphemy cases due to fear of violence from Islamist extremists if they did not levy harsh sentences. Legal observers said the lower court judges who did rule on blasphemy cases continued to quickly convict and sentence the accused, often with the understanding that those convicted likely would be freed on appeal by higher court judges, who had better security protection.

Ahmadi Muslim Ramzan Bibi remained free on bail while awaiting trial for blasphemy. In April 2020, Bibi donated money for a ceremony being held in a Sunni mosque in her village in Punjab, but the mosque returned the money because Ahmadis are barred by law from engaging in Muslim practices such as giving to mosques. She asked a non-Ahmadi relative why the money was returned, but the conversation turned into a dispute resulting in a verbal and physical altercation. Clerics of the village informed the district police officer that Bibi had committed blasphemy. Police arrested and charged her under Section 295-C of the penal code, which carries the death penalty. She was arrested and spent 10 months in jail before the Lahore High Court granted her bail in 2021. Her trial remained pending at year’s end.

During the year, courts overturned some blasphemy convictions upon appeal and acquitted or granted bail to some individuals who had spent years in prison on blasphemy charges. For example, on January 5, the Supreme Court granted post-arrest bail to Qamar Aqash after he had spent more than four years in jail for allegedly using blasphemous language on social media. On January 6, the Supreme Court granted Nadeem Samson bail in his blasphemy case on the grounds that his trial had been delayed for more than two years after his arrest. On May 31, the Lahore High Court granted Stephen Masih bail in a blasphemy case after he had spent more than three years in jail. On August 23, the Supreme Court granted Salamat Mansha Masih bail on the grounds that the state had produced insufficient evidence that he had committed blasphemy. According to legal experts, bail was exceedingly rare in blasphemy cases that carried the death penalty. All four cases were ongoing at year’s end.

Mubasher Ahmad, Ghulam Ahmad, and Ehsan Ahmad, Ahmadis arrested in 2014 on charges of blasphemy and “acts intended to outrage religious feelings,” were freed from prison on January 14. A court in Ferozwala, Punjab, sentenced all three to death for insulting the Prophet Muhammad in 2017, but that conviction was overturned on appeal by the Lahore High Court in December 2021. Their other convictions for “acts intended to outrage religious feelings” were upheld and they were released after serving eight years of a 10-year sentence.

On January 24, a sessions court in Lahore acquitted Asim Aslam of blasphemy, based on a complaint filed by his brother Faisal Aslam in 2011. Although Faisal acknowledged that his brother had a history of mental illness, Asim was initially convicted based on a confession and sentenced to life in prison. The Lahore High Court suspended the sentence and ordered a retrial in 2021 “in light of [Aslam’s] mental health” that led to his acquittal.

On February 7, according to media reports, a local court acquitted the principal of a Karachi public school and a school employee in a blasphemy case from 2018. A passerby had accused Javed Akhter, the principal, and Muhammad Shahid Khan of burning Islamic studies textbooks. After a trial lasting three years, the judge noted “material contradictions” in witnesses’ testimony against the two men and ruled that the prosecution had failed to prove the charges against them.

In at least one instance, police prevented an individual accused of blasphemy from being lynched. On August 21, Hyderabad police stopped a crowd from lynching a Hindu sanitation worker the crowd claimed had thrown burnt pages of the Quran from a residential building. A large contingent of police responded to the incident and arrested the man for blasphemy. Later, police arrested a Muslim man who confessed to burning pages of the Quran and another man who had circulated a video on social media calling on Muslims to “attack Hindu businessmen wherever you find them.” Markets and businesses in Hyderabad remained shut for two days after authorities imposed a city-wide ban on gatherings of four or more persons. Observers in Hyderabad reported that many Hindu families left the area after the incident, and some closed their shops due to security concerns.

Media reported in February that Christian nurse Tabitha Gill, accused of blasphemy in 2021 for saying she would pray for someone at the hospital where she worked, went into hiding along with her family. The blasphemy case filed against her remained active.

As reported by Catholic media in May, then UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief Ahmed Shaheed said the country’s blasphemy law was a particularly grave violation of human rights and religious freedom. “That blasphemy law is creating havoc in Pakistan,” he said. “It’s costing lives” and it works “to undermine religious freedom.” He also stated, “The mere existence of the law has emboldened extremists...and resulted in a breakdown of law and order” in the country.

In August, the Ministry of the Interior ordered the Punjab provincial government to take action against CSJ for a report on minority religious rights in the country that CSJ and other NGOs submitted to the UN Human Rights Council in July. Media said the report described incidents of forced conversion of Christians and misuse of the country’s blasphemy laws in violation of international human rights obligations and the country’s own laws. According to UCA News and the Urdu newspaper *Jang*, the CSJ report was considered “anti-state propaganda” by the government. UCA News said that 30 human rights organizations endorsed the report, including the Justice and Peace Commission of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference and the Joint Action Committee for People’s Rights (JAC), an umbrella group that included 37 human rights groups. In a statement, the Muslim chair of the JAC urged the government to “constructively consider” the “concrete and workable recommendations” in the report. On December 16, CSJ filed a restraining order with the Lahore High Court against the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies and the Punjab Provincial Department of Industries, Commerce, and Investment for harassment and threatening to cancel CSJ’s NGO registration on “spurious, unfounded and vague grounds without any lawful justification.” At the end of the year, the court had restrained the Punjab authorities from taking any action against CSJ while the litigation was ongoing.

On October 6, the FIA announced the creation of a dedicated unit to investigate and handle like other cybercrimes blasphemy allegations online and on social media. The creation of the new unit followed remarks by Justice Chaudhry Abdul Aziz of the Lahore High Court, who said the pace of investigations and court processing of cyber cases related to blasphemy was slow, the FIA did not always present accurate information to the courts about blasphemy, and the FIA had transferred officials out of the FIA who had handled blasphemy cybercrimes in the past. Media said that a legal petition by Tehreek-i-Tahaffuz-i-Namoos-i-Risalat Pakistan, a conservative group of clerics and lawyers pursuing blasphemy cases, also influenced the FIA. The group filed a petition with the Lahore High Court urging speedy trials and the creation of a consolidated database on blasphemy cases pending with the FIA. One lawyer told the media, "If there can be child pornography and harassment units in the FIA Cybercrime Wing, why not create a dedicated cell to deal with blasphemy complaints?" He also said special courts and special benches in high courts dedicated to blasphemy cases would help speed up those cases. According to media reports, the FIA informed the Lahore High Court that 655 complaints of blasphemy had been filed with the agency in the "past couple of years." Other legal observers said the number of blasphemy complaints to the FIA was much higher.

NGOs, legal observers, and religious minority representatives continued to raise concerns regarding the failure of lower courts to adhere to basic evidentiary standards in blasphemy cases. They also raised concerns about the slow pace of adjudicating these cases, including cyber cases, which led to some suspects remaining in detention for years as they waited for their initial trial or appeals, and 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 with spectators from groups supportive of harsh punishment for blasphemy, such as the Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) party, who often threatened the defendants' attorneys, family members, and supporters. At other times, advocacy groups reported that for security reasons, blasphemy trials were held inside jails, resulting in a loss of transparency. Legal observers also reported judges and magistrates often delayed or continued trials indefinitely to avoid confrontation with, or threats or violence from, the groups provoking protests. In some cases, judges and court staff delayed trials in the hopes of having the case transferred to another judge. Police, prosecutors, and defense attorneys were similarly reluctant to appear in blasphemy cases, which further delayed investigations and trials, according to legal observers.

NGOs and legal observers continued to say that the law requiring a senior police official to investigate any blasphemy charge before a complaint may be filed contributed to objective investigations and the dismissal of many blasphemy cases. Some NGOs noted, however, that police did not uniformly follow this procedure. In some cases, the court remanded the accused to police custody for 14 days before he or she had been formally charged so that a senior officer might carry out an investigation. In other cases, lower-ranking police filed blasphemy charges without waiting for the required investigation by a senior police official. NGOs and legal observers again stated police rarely filed charges against individuals who made false blasphemy accusations.

There were reported cases of government intervention and action by courts, law enforcement, and local authorities in situations of attempted kidnapping and forced conversion. Enforcement action against alleged perpetrators was rare, however. An NGO reported 124 cases of forced marriage and the conversion of Christian, Hindu, and Sikh women and girls during the year, a 59 percent increase over the previous year's count of 78 cases. Most victims were minors, and at least 23 percent were less than 14 years old. Other estimates of forced or coerced conversions vary widely – from as few as five per year to as many as 500. Human rights activists stated that to avoid prosecution, abductors

commonly coerced their victims into overstating their age and claiming that they converted to Islam and married willingly. In many cases, courts accepted this testimony and granted custody to the abductor.

According to media reports, an 18-year-old Hindu woman, Pooja Kumari, was shot and killed in her home in Rohri, Sindh, on March 21 by a Muslim man, Wahid Bux Lashari, after she resisted his attempts to kidnap her. Kumari's family told police and media that Lashari, who was from an influential landowning tribe, had been harassing Kumari and asking her to convert to Islam and marry him, but she refused. The death led to province-wide protests by the Hindu community against forced conversions and violence against girls and women from minority communities. Kumari belonged to the marginalized Ohd scheduled caste community. Sindh police arrested Lashari on March 21, and he reportedly confessed to the crime. On July 24, a local jirga pardoned Lashari in exchange for his paying approximately 1,800,000 rupees (\$8,000) in compensation to Kumari's family. In return, the family withdrew the murder charge. The family was reportedly pressured by police and local politicians to accept the settlement.

On April 30, a Muslim couple abducted a 12-year-old Christian girl from her family home in Rawalpindi and brought her to Faisalabad, where she was forced to renounce her faith and marry the Muslim man as his second wife. The minimum marriageable age in Punjab is 16. The girl was later rescued by police and her abductors arrested. On May 14, her abductors were released after police recommended against filing charges in the case, and a court ordered the girl returned to the Muslim couple's custody. On August 18, a judge of the Rawalpindi bench of the Lahore High Court ruled that the girl had married and converted to Islam "of her own free will" and dismissed her parents' request to return her to them.

According to human rights activists, on August 12, Shaman Ali Magsi, a Muslim man, abducted a Hindu girl when she was returning to her home in Hyderabad, Sindh, after work. Members of Hyderabad's Hindu community protesting outside the local press club said that police initially refused to accept her mother's criminal complaint against the abductor. Police rescued the girl from a house in Karachi on October 20. Rather than return the girl to her parents, a local magistrate in Hyderabad granted a shelter custody for her and ordered a medical examination to determine the girl's age after her abductor claimed she was 19 and had willingly converted to Islam to marry him. The medical report concluded that she was 16 years of age, and at year's end she remained at the shelter.

In March, an HRCP fact-finding mission to southern Punjab reported that religious minorities in the Saraiki Belt area of that province, including Hindus and Christians, were at risk of forced conversion, forcible occupation of their lands, intimidation by extremist groups, and discrimination in employment. In the HRCP report, a human rights activist in Bahawalpur described discrimination against these communities in the area as "religious apartheid" imposed either with the collusion of state actors or because of state neglect and failure to protect. In the report, the HRCP also reiterated its call to establish a national commission on minorities' rights, with statutory authority to enforce those rights.

Religious minorities and several organizations continued to protest the government's weak response to alleged cases of forced marriage and forced conversion, noting such incidents continue to happen regularly in all provinces.

The Ministry of Interior maintained multitier 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 Shia religious holidays such as Ashura (Schedule 4). The Rawalpindi District administration banned 112 Sunni and Shia Islamic clerics it considered to be “firebrands” from entering the district during the Shia holy month of Muharram, stating this was in order to maintain peace and interfaith harmony during the commemorations and related processions during the period. The district administration in Khanewal, Punjab, banned 38 Sunni and Shia clerics from different sects from the district during Muharram due to their history of delivering provocative speeches.

According to media reports and law enforcement sources, in the weeks leading up to and during Muharram, authorities at the federal level also restricted the movement and activities of certain clerics to keep the peace. Shia community representatives, however, accused authorities of bias by restricting their religious ceremonies and arresting community members.

According to Ahmadiyya community leaders, authorities continued to target and harass Ahmadi Muslims for blasphemy, violations of “anti-Ahmadi laws,” and other crimes. Ahmadi 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. Ahmadiyya community representatives continued to say that NADRA required Ahmadis to declare in an affidavit that they were non-Muslims to obtain a national identification card.

Ahmadiyya Muslim community representatives continued to state that Ahmadi families were unable to register their marriages with local administrative bodies, known as union councils, since the councils considered Ahmadis to be outside the authority of the Muslim Family Law of 1961.

In March, the Punjab provincial cabinet approved an amendment to existing law to require Muslims intending to marry to declare that Muhammad was the final prophet of Islam, which runs counter to Ahmadi beliefs. On July 31, the provincial government ordered local administrative councils to amend all marriage licenses to include the legally binding declaration on the finality of prophethood or face disciplinary action.

Community representatives reported Christians continued to face 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). Members of Parliament, church leaders, and advocates continued to debate the text of a 2019 draft law designed to govern Christian marriages nationwide, but no progress was reported during the year. Members of Parliament and officials of the Ministry of Human Rights and the Ministry of Law and Justice continued to consult with church leaders from prominent Christian denominations and with NGO representatives, but the denominations, church leaders, and NGO representatives had not agreed on elements of the draft law pertaining to divorce and interfaith marriage by year’s end.

Although the Sindh Hindu Marriage Act covered registration of Sikh marriages in that province, members of the Sikh community reportedly continued to seek a separate Sikh law so as not to be considered as Hindus for the purposes of the law. Some Hindu activists reported implementation of the law remained uneven, with more consistent application in urban areas.

On July 10, police arrested three members of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community in Punjab’s Faisalabad for sacrificing animals on Eid-al-Adha. In all, five individuals were accused under the penal code section that bans Ahmadis from “posing” as Muslims or committing any act that “in any manner

whatsoever outrages the religious feelings of Muslims.” The charge carries a sentence of up to three years in prison. The five were free on bail at the end of the year.

Some religious minority leaders continued to criticize the process by which political party leaders selected parliamentarians for reserved minority seats through internal deliberations rather than elections. According to these minority leaders, only “rich businessmen” were selected through this process, and many were not well regarded by the minority communities they are meant to represent. Others said parliamentarians occupying reserved seats had little influence in either their parties or the legislatures because they did not have a voting constituency. Women from religious minority communities criticized political parties for nominating only men to seats reserved for religious minorities in all legislative bodies, and they demanded amendments to the law to make mandatory the appointment of religious minority women to these seats.

On September 27, Jamil Bismil, a Hindu resident of Bajaur, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and general secretary of the Bajaur Minority Association, said the persistence of discrimination against minorities was because of their lack of political representation – specifically, that their representatives were selected by political parties at both the national and provincial levels rather than directly elected. According to other activists, these minority parliamentarians’ lack of direct accountability to voters hindered their communities from enjoying equal rights.

NGOs active on religious freedom issues reported harassment by police and intelligence services, including threats to shut them down if they continued their efforts.

The government continued to permit limited, non-Muslim foreign missionary activity and to allow those missionaries to preach, 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 processed visa applications for “Christian missionaries” invited by organizations registered in the country. The sponsoring organization had to certify that the applicant was a bona fide member of their organization and must assume responsibility for the missionary’s financial support. In their visa applications, missionaries had to declare to “respect and abide by the laws of Pakistan” and to “refrain from indulging in internal politics.” Missionary visas were valid for one year and permitted one reentry per year and a single one-year extension. According to missionary sources, 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. According to the Ministry website, “Entry visas are not granted to foreign missionaries desirous of opening new missions or strengthening existing ones engaged in proselytizing activities.” One missionary from a registered church stated that the government did not impede or restrict missionary activity. Civil society contacts stated that missionary activity was permitted by the government but was limited in practice by general social intolerance of proselytizing to Muslims. Civil society contacts reported that visas for foreign missionaries were sometimes refused or delayed for so long that the mission had to be cancelled.

On January 16, the Lahore High Court denied bail to Ahmadis Mahmood Iqbal Hashmi, Shiraz Ahmad, and Zaheer Ahmad, who were accused of sharing an unauthorized translation of the Quran in a WhatsApp group and were arrested in 2019 on blasphemy charges. The original charging document stated that the accused were “preaching Ahmadiyya beliefs” and “propagating Ahmadiyya materials.” In his decision denying the three bail, Justice Tariq Saleem Sheikh stated the men created a WhatsApp group for the “propagation of the Qadiani/Ahmadi faith” and that allowing people to share objectionable material in such a group would be “a recipe for disaster.” Hashmi was subsequently granted bail by

the Supreme Court on April 27. Shiraz Ahmad and Zaheer Ahmad remained in jail awaiting trial at year's end.

In their August 23 ruling in the case *Salamat Mansha Masih v. The State, etc.*, Supreme Court Justices Qazi Faez Isa and Syed Mansoor Ali Shah wrote, "Preaching of Christianity is not a crime nor can it be made into one because of the Fundamental Right [in the constitution] 'to profess, practice and propagate his religion.'"

During the year, in a new video, the Pakistan Telecommunications Authority (PTA) urged parents to monitor the online activity of their children to ensure they did not post potentially blasphemous content. The PTA stated the video was only a public service announcement, and that it would leave action against violators to law enforcement.

The PTA reported it had blocked 1,135,814 URLs for illegal or anti-state content through September 14 after receiving complaints about those URLs. The PTA stated it acted on more than 94 percent of more than 1.2 million complaints about objectionable content, including 905,009 complaints related to decency and morality, 78,119 related to "the glory of Islam," and 40,536 related to sectarianism/hate speech.

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. The government also continued a nationwide survey of former religious properties managed by the ETPB so that the relevant religious groups could reclaim and restore their old properties, most of which were former Hindu temples and Sikh gurdwaras abandoned during partition. As of June, the government's Survey of Pakistan mapping agency had surveyed, geotagged, and digitized 95 percent of the target properties, which will be renovated in a collaboration between the ETPB, provincial governments, and Sikh and Hindu community members.

In January, for example, the Walled City of Lahore Authority (WCLA) started preservation work on a temple and six churches in parts of Punjab after initial documentation and mapping were completed for the sites. The temple and the churches' restoration projects were scheduled to be completed by June 2023. By the end of 2022, the WCLA estimated it had completed 75 percent of the conservation and restoration work on another project, the 1,000-year-old Shivala Hindu Temple in Sialkot, Punjab. An ETPB official attributed the slow pace of restoration work to a lack of sufficient funding from the Punjab government.

In June, the ETPB completed the restoration of the historic Jain Mandir temple in Lahore and re-opened it to visitors. The site was heavily damaged in 1992 during religious riots in the region that followed the destruction of the Babri Mosque in India. The Lahore High Court ordered the restoration in 2021.

Although there continued to be no official restriction on the construction of Ahmadi places of worship, Ahmadiyya Muslim community leaders stated local authorities regularly denied requisite construction permits and forbade Ahmadis from calling their places of worship mosques. Media outlets reported that on October 12, Mufti Qasim Fakhri, a sitting member of the Sindh Provincial Assembly from the TLP and chairman of the assembly's committee on religious affairs, led a group of protesters outside an Ahmadi mosque in Karachi, accompanied by police. The lawmaker harassed worshippers and demanded their arrest and the demolition of the mosque, saying the use of minarets and domes by the community was a violation of the country's anti-Ahmadi laws. No arrests were reported.

Authorities provided enhanced security for Shia Muslim, Christian, and Hindu places of worship at various times throughout the year, including around religious holidays or in response to specific threats. In February, the Sindh Police announced the creation of a new unit, the Special Protection Force for Minorities, with a mandate to protect churches, temples, and gurdwaras across the province. The unit had an authorized strength of 5,000 officers and began hiring 2,800 officers from Karachi. In June, Shoaib Suddle, the single member of the One-Man Commission on Minority Rights (constituted by the Supreme Court of Pakistan), reported that Sindh had recruited 1,200 officers for the unit. He also reported that Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were working to raise similar units, but that Balochistan had not yet complied with Suddle's mandate to create such a unit. In April, the Inspector General of Punjab Police announced increased security for Easter celebrations. Provincial police deployed more than 12,000 personnel and security forces to protect churches and processions. Christian and Hindu representatives in Sindh and Balochistan stated the police generally provided adequate security for minority places of worship, especially at major holidays.

Ahmadiyya community representatives noted their religious sites and cemeteries continued to lack police protection nationwide.

On September 4, four Ahmadi children were expelled from The Educators School's Mithial campus in Attock, Punjab. In a letter to the children's parents, the school principal wrote, "The following students who were studying in this institute are being withdrawal [sic] on the basis of Qadianiat [Ahmadi] Religion." No further explanation was provided. Ahmadi leaders protested that the expulsions were a violation of the country's constitution, which makes education a fundamental right. School officials later apologized and offered to re-admit the students after pressure from the media and human rights groups brought attention to the incident. The children's parents opted to enroll them in a different school.

The government continued to implement the Single National Curriculum, which it renamed the National Curriculum of Pakistan in July. The initiative aimed to standardize primary school instruction across the country's three types of educational institutions – private, public, and religious. Religious minority groups criticized the curriculum's emphasis on an Islamic perspective in non-religious subjects, including Urdu, English, and geography, and argued the curriculum violated constitutional restrictions on "compulsory religious instruction" and the constitution's delegation of most authority for education to provincial governments. Since October, when the Sindh provincial government agreed to use the new curriculum, all four provinces now use it. The Punjab provincial government granted the Islamic Ulema Board a role in reviewing and approving the curriculum, but not leaders from religious minority groups.

The Supreme Court continued to review a petition from Shoaib Suddle of the court's commission for the protection of religious minorities, that objected to Islamic religious content in compulsory education; the petition remained pending before the court at year's end. In his petition, Suddle stated that the compulsory curriculum, including Urdu- and English-language courses and other non-Islamic general courses, contained extensive Islamic content (as well as negative stereotypes of non-Muslims) and therefore forced religious minority students to receive Islamic religious instruction. Suddle recommended removing Islamic content from these subjects and concentrating it solely in Islamic studies textbooks, because that subject was compulsory only for Muslim students. The chairman of the Council of Islamic Ideology opposed the petition. The Advocates General of Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Provinces told the court that their textbooks were in conformity with the law.

While the law only requires schools to teach Islamic studies and the Quran to Muslim students, sources continued to report many non-Muslim students had to participate in these courses because their schools did not offer parallel courses in their own religious beliefs or ethics. The government did not permit Ahmadi Muslims to teach Islamic studies in public schools.

Civil society groups continued to report that some madrassahs around the country, particularly those that were unregistered, taught doctrine they considered to promote violent extremism and intolerance toward religious minorities. These groups also noted the government sought to curb this practice through madrassah registration and curriculum reform.

Legal experts and NGOs reported that the full legal framework for minority rights remained unclear. While the Ministry of Law and Justice was officially responsible for protecting the legal rights of all citizens, in practice, the Ministry for Human Rights continued to assume primary responsibility for protecting 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 recommendations and requests for information.

Members of religious minority communities continued to say that the Ministries of Law and Justice, Interior, and Human Rights inconsistently applied laws safeguarding minority rights and enforcing the protections of religious minorities. Religious minority community members 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. In one example, in August, a group of individuals protested outside the Lahore Laser Eye Hospital Pattoki and Madina Hospital Pattoki in Kasur District, Punjab, claiming that Ahmadi employees were preaching *Qadianiat* (Ahmadi beliefs) to patients. In response, police summoned the hospital administrators and Ahmadi staff to the police station and forced them to submit an affidavit stating they were not involved in proselytization.

Religious freedom activists and civil society groups continued to raise concerns regarding the limited powers of the National Commission for Minorities and the decision to exclude Ahmadi Muslims from being represented on the commission when it was formed. Ahmadi Muslim leaders said they would not join the body because it required them to identify as non-Muslims. The commission continued to function without legislative authority and without power to resolve problems. Minority religious leaders expressed their preference that the commission operate under the Ministry for Human Rights rather than under the Ministry for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony. Minority religious leaders said the Ministry of Religious Affairs was dominated by conservative clerics who had manifested biases against minorities in past public statements and actions, and that it was primarily concerned with regulating and facilitating the annual Hajj to Mecca. In contrast, they said the Ministry of Human Rights already oversaw and supported other national commissions with a similar role and mandate, including the NCHR, the National Commission on the Status of Women, and National Commission on the Rights of the Child.

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

Members of religious minorities, particularly lower-caste Hindus and Christians, reported cases of forceful evictions from their homes and villages by government officials assisting individuals desiring their land. In February, local Christians from the Korangi District in Karachi protested in front of the Karachi Press Club against the local “land mafias” who they said came to their homes with false property deeds and police escorts to forcibly expel them. The Korangi Christian residents reported being beaten and threatened with violence, including rape, if they did not leave their homes.

Some minority rights activists said that Islamist groups leveraged flood-related assistance to persuade non-Muslims to convert to Islam in Sindh, particularly in southern districts with a substantial population of scheduled caste Hindus. There were also reports of discrimination and violence against minority community members in flood relief and rescue efforts. On September 6, *Awami Awaz* journalist Nasrullah Gadani reported that authorities forcibly evicted members of the scheduled caste Bagri community from a relief camp in Mirpur Mathelo, Sindh, because of their faith. In a video that went viral, Bagri community members told Gadani that they had lost their homes due to flooding and wanted to take shelter at a local relief camp but were asked to leave because they were non-Muslim “untouchables.” Later, police registered a case against Gadani for interfering in their work at the camp.

Most minority religious groups said they continued to face discrimination in government hiring. According to activists, provincial governments also often failed to meet the 5 percent civil service hiring quota for religious minorities.

According to a report released by the NCHR in May, nearly half the government posts reserved for religious minorities were vacant and 80 percent of the non-Muslims who were appointed to positions in the 5 percent of government jobs reserved for them were working in low-paid sanitation jobs. The NCHR report, *Unequal Citizens: Ending Systemic Discrimination against Minorities*, highlighted issues facing minorities, including hazardous working conditions, inadequate safety gear and equipment, lack of job security, and low compensation to those injured or to the families of those who died in the course of their work, including in jobs considered degrading or dangerous, for which only non-Muslims were encouraged or allowed to apply. The NCHR recommended using machinery where there was a danger of death or injury to manual-labor sanitation workers, and providing social security and health-care benefits to workers.

Minority rights activists said most government employment advertisements for sanitation workers continued to list being non-Muslim as a requirement. Minority rights activists criticized these advertisements as discriminatory and insulting. On May 25, the Punjab government banned all departments from advertising a “non-Muslims only” condition when recruiting sanitation workers. The Services and General Administration Department issued an amended notice after the Punjab chapter of the NCHR raised concerns over the practice. The provincial governments of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan followed suit and banned discriminatory job advertisements for sanitation workers in September and November, respectively. Civil society representatives welcomed the change, which they viewed as a step toward de-linking minorities and “dirty jobs” in the public consciousness.

Representatives of religious minorities continued to say a “glass ceiling” prevented their promotion to senior government positions, but one NGO stated that due to insufficient higher education opportunities compared to the majority religious community, few religious minorities met the qualifications to apply for senior positions, anyway. While there were no official obstacles to the advancement of minority religious group members in the military, and an NGO said a few Christian

officers had become generals, Ahmadi officers rarely rose above the rank of colonel and were not assigned to senior positions.

Community leaders continued to state the government did not take adequate action to protect its poorest citizens, including religious minorities, such as Christian and Hindu Dalits, from bonded labor practices such as landowners forcing people to work, sometimes for multiple generations, to pay off alleged debts owed to the landowner. Hindu Dalits remained vulnerable to human rights violations and pressure by perpetrators to withdraw police cases. The Bonded Labor Liberation Front, an NGO, reported that nearly 8 million people worked in debt bondage around the country in 2022, 98 percent at brick kilns. Most bonded laborers working in brick kilns were Christians or Hindu Dalits. In one example, the NGO reported that a Hindu Dalit bonded laborer, Shewal Ram, was rescued from a brick kiln in Kasur, Punjab, in February through the intervention of the Lahore High Court. He was reportedly falsely accused of theft at a police station in Saddar, Kasur, to prevent him from leaving the kiln where he worked. His brother and five other families were reportedly still held in debt bondage at kilns at the end of the year.

On December 6, the Amnesty International chapter at the Lahore University of Management Sciences planned a panel discussion on tolerance in the country with members of marginalized minority communities, but university administrators later told the organizers not to include the proposed Ahmadi Muslim representative. The organizers left an open chair onstage to protest the exclusion and later explained the absence in a series of social media posts. The decision to exclude the Ahmadi representative was criticized by several participants at the event and commentators on social media.

The government continued to prohibit citizens, regardless of religious affiliation, from traveling to Israel by marking Pakistani passports as “valid in all countries, except for Israel.” Representatives of the Baha’i community continued to say this policy particularly affected them because the Baha’i World Center – the spiritual and administrative center of the community – is in Haifa, Israel. Christian advocates also called on the government to allow Christians to travel to Israel.

Government officials and politicians continued to attend and speak at *Khatm-e-Nabuwat* (Finality of Prophethood) conferences held in major cities and at religious sites around the country. The groups that organized the conferences stated they were defending the teaching that Prophet Muhammad was the final prophet. Both secular and Ahmadi critics said the conferences were venues for hate speech against Ahmadi Muslims.

On September 6, Punjab Chief Minister Pervez Elahi and member of the Punjab Assembly Hafiz Ammar Yasir participated in a Khatm-e-Nabuwat conference at Ashrafia Islamic University Lahore. Elahi praised former Prime Minister Khan for his efforts to protect the dignity of the Prophet Muhammad around the world.

During the year, several political leaders used inflammatory religious language to attack their political rivals. On September 13, Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz party leader Javed Latif, in a press conference, accused former Prime Minister Imran Khan of “attacking the basic principles of Islam” by “supporting” the Ahmadiyya community while he was in office. Latif accused Khan of giving interviews to foreign media in which he promised that “Qadianis [Ahmadis] will be given religious freedom.” Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam Pakistan Party leader Fazl ur-Rehman tweeted messages on September 7 calling Khan a “pro-Qadiani” and a “Jewish agent.” Leaders of Khan’s Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Party responded by accusing the government of “spreading religious bigotry and hatred.”

On July 30, Malik Ilyas Awan, deputy president of the Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid for Punjab Province called for the withdrawal of security provided to Ahmadis in Jauharabad. Awan said, "They cannot worship openly in the Islamic state of Pakistan. They were granted a place in Chenab Nagar during the government of [Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali] Bhutto. They cannot hold any kind of worship outside." He further stated that the Ahmadis should be expelled from the district, as they did not believe Muhammad was the final prophet.

On December 22, according to media reports, at a ceremony to celebrate Christmas traditions, Prime Minister Sharif said that the government would protect the rights of people from all religious minorities, including Christians, Sikhs, Hindus, and Parsis and would ensure a secure environment for them.

The Ahmadiyya community reported 13 incidents of damage to Ahmadi mosques and 137 incidents of Ahmadi gravestones and tombs being vandalized or destroyed during the year. Human rights advocates and Ahmadiyya Muslim community leaders reported police and local authorities rarely took action to prevent attacks on Ahmadi mosques or to punish assailants who vandalized or destroyed Ahmadi mosques, minarets, and gravestones. In several instances, they said police participated in or even led the attacks. Local authorities generally prevented the repair or rebuilding of minarets, gravestones with Islamic verses, or other structures with identifiably Islamic features.

On February 7, Punjab police defaced approximately 45 Ahmadi graves in the Hafizabad District of Punjab, removing plaques and destroying gravestones in one cemetery, under the auspices of the law against Ahmadis "pretending to be Muslims." In July, Punjab police defaced 53 Ahmadi graves in two local graveyards in Gujranwala district by removing Islamic verses from gravestones.

On May 10, the district police officer in Ghughyat, Sargodha District, Punjab, ordered members of the Ahmadi community to remove Arabic inscriptions from the graves of their relatives in the local cemetery. When they refused, police returned the next day and defaced 30 gravestones by removing the Islamic inscriptions. On June 3, local government officials and police officers in the same village forcibly removed plates bearing Islamic inscriptions from the private homes of Ahmadi residents.

In June, police officers in Pind Dadan Khan, Jhelum District, Punjab, ordered Ahmadi residents to dismantle the minarets of their mosque and remove tombstones with Islamic inscriptions from their relatives' graves.

On September 13, police in Gojra, Toba Tek Singh District, Punjab, destroyed the minaret of an Ahmadi mosque. Police, acting on a complaint, at first demanded that the Ahmadi community remove the minaret themselves; when they refused, the District Superintendent of Police and 14 officers demolished the minaret.

In May, an Antiterrorism Court in Bahwalpur convicted 22 individuals of vandalism and sentenced them to five years' imprisonment and a 400,000-rupee (\$1,800) fine each for the August 4, 2021, attack on the Siddhivinayak Hindu temple in the small village of Bhong in Rahim Yar Khan in Punjab. The court acquitted 62 others accused of taking part in the violence.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Throughout the year, individuals, often unidentified, assaulted and killed Hindus, Christians, Ahmadis, Sikhs, Sunnis, and Shia in attacks sources believed to be religiously motivated. The attackers'

relationship to organized terrorist groups was often unknown. Civil society organizations and media documented 13 persons killed for their faith during the year: four Christians, three Hindus, two Sikhs, two Ahmadis, and two Shia Muslims.

In one example, on January 30, unidentified attackers on a motorcycle shot two Christian clerics in Peshawar as they drove home from church, killing Pastor William Siraj and wounding Reverend Patrick Naeem. Both victims were from the Protestant Church of Pakistan's Peshawar Diocese. In a social media post, Bishop Azad Marshall of the Church of Pakistan said, "We demand justice and protection of Christians from the government of Pakistan." On January 31, Special Advisor to the Prime Minister Ashrafi, who is also head of the All-Pakistan Ulema Council, joined other Muslim religious leaders to offer Muslim prayers for the victims inside Peshawar's St. John's Cathedral. In his meeting with Bishop Humphrey Peters of the Diocese of Peshawar and members of the local Christian community, Ashrafi pledged unity and vowed the federal and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provincial governments and all law enforcement agencies would "stand firm with the Christian community and will find those responsible." Ashrafi called the killing an "attack against Pakistan meant to cause fear and chaos in the nation and damage to Pakistan's image before the world." Hina Jilani, the chair of the HRCP, said in a statement that the NGO saw the attack "as a blatant assault not only on Pakistan's Christian community but on all religious minorities whose right to life and security of person remains under constant threat." Media outlets reported that Jilani demanded more steps for the protection of religious minorities. On February 6, protesters gathered outside the National Press Club in Peshawar to demand that police bring the perpetrators to justice and protect the lives and property of religious minorities.

On January 31, Satan Lal, a Hindu businessman, was shot dead in Ghotki District, Sindh. The Hindu community blocked a highway and staged a sit-in in front of the police station to protest and demand justice for the killing, which media reported stemmed from a property dispute. Police arrested Bachal Dahar, a Muslim, and others for the killing.

On February 13, a crowd beat to death a mentally disabled Muslim man, Mushtaq Ahmed (or Mushtaq Rajput), and hung his body from a tree. Police said the assailants used batons, axes, and iron rods to kill the victim. Police also said the attack took place after the prayer leader's son at a local mosque said he had seen Mushtaq burning pages of the Quran. Punjab police, who were attacked by the crowd when they arrived on the scene, arrested 33 people for the killing and detained 119 more for questioning. Then-Prime Minister Khan said, "The lynching will be dealt with the full severity of the law," and police "failed in their duty" to prevent it. In a statement, then Minister for Human Rights Shireen Mazari said, "The Punjab government must immediately take action against the police that watched it happen and the perpetrators. Laws exist – the police must enforce these laws and not allow mobs to rule the day." Following the killing of Mushtaq, the Council of Islamic Ideology issued a statement declaring that "subjecting any person to violence on allegations of dishonoring religion, desecration of the Holy Quran and [sanctity of the Prophet Muhammad] was against Sharia, inhumane, and contrary to Islamic principles."

On February 14, a group of Muslims killed Pervez Masih, a Christian, in an area of Lahore in which Muslim and Christian neighborhoods are starkly divided. A group of 150 to 200 Muslims entered a Christian neighborhood, dragged Masih from his shop and beat him, causing fatal head injuries. Police said the incident followed a minor altercation the night before between Christians and Muslims in the area; the Muslims retaliated after Christians reported the altercation to the police. Civil society representatives said the incident began as a personal conflict, then escalated to violence because of religious intolerance and because police failed to act on the complaint filed after the first altercation.

One NGO said Masih's killing was "a result of a personal vendetta and discrimination due to [his] faith."

On March 13, two assailants shot and killed Syed Salman Haider Rizvi, general secretary of the Shia organization Pasban-e-Aza and former president of the Khair-ul-Amal mosque, outside his home in Karachi. Salman was the son of Syed Salman Haider, the founder of Pasban-e-Aza. The national Shia organization Majlis Wahdat-e-Muslimeen said the killing was evidence of a national conspiracy to kill Shia leaders.

On March 29, three female students at Jamia Islamia Falahul Binaat girls' madrassah in Anjumabad, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, stabbed and killed their teacher, Safoora Bibi, after one of their relatives, a 13-year-old girl, reportedly had a dream that Bibi had committed blasphemy. Media outlets reported the three were arrested and charged with murder. They were in jail awaiting trial at the end of the year.

On May 17, Ali Raza, also known as Mulazim Hussain, a madrassah student, attacked and fatally stabbed Abdul Salam, an Ahmadi, as he was returning home from his agricultural fields in Okara District, Punjab. According to police, the killing was religiously motivated, and Raza shouted religious slogans as he fled the scene. Salam's uncle told reporters that Raza was a member of the TLP and killed Salam due to the organization's hatred of Ahmadis. Raza was arrested by police and remained in custody awaiting trial at year's end.

On August 12, Shehzad Hasan Sinjalvi killed Naseer Ahmad, an Ahmadi, at a bus stop in Rabwah (Chenab Nagar), Punjab. Sinjalvi approached Ahmad, asked him if he was an Ahmadi, and demanded he chant slogans praising the founder of the TLP. He then stabbed Ahmad to death. Police arrested Sinjalvi and charged him with murder.

On October 2, Shia scholar Zakir Naveed Ashiq was shot while addressing a religious gathering in Kothe Pathana village, Sialkot District, Punjab. He later died of his wounds. The shooter, identified as Zeeshan, was detained by the participants at the gathering until police arrived to arrest him. Hundreds of protesters later gathered outside the deceased's house and burned tires, demanding that the police and Chief Minister of Punjab ensure the perpetrator be brought to justice.

Activists and members of minority communities said the country's culture of impunity, along with state inaction, was fueling hate crimes and blasphemy accusations. Asad Butt, co-chair of the NGO HRCP, criticized the government for ignoring the problem. In an interview published by *DW.com* on October 10, he said, "Instead of taking action, the government is talking to the Taliban, who killed Christians, Ahmadis, and many Muslims, and [to] extremist groups that spread hate against minorities." Activists also said extremists have strong influence in the country and that this extremism is being fed by an increase in the number of madrassahs.

On April 18, a Special Antiterrorism Court in Gujranwala, Punjab, set up inside a high-security prison, convicted 15 men for the 2021 murder of Priyantha Kumara, a Sri Lankan Christian manager of a factory in Sialkot who was beaten to death and his body set on fire after factory workers accused him of blasphemy. Another 73 accused were convicted of other offenses related to Kumara's murder. The court sentenced six persons to death for the murder and nine persons to life in prison. Of the others, one was sentenced to five years in prison and the 72 others to two years in prison for participating in the violence. Eight of those convicted were minors. One person, a minor, was acquitted.

On September 26, a local court acquitted two men charged with the 2021 killing of an Ahmadi doctor, Abdul Qadir, at his clinic in Peshawar. The trial judge said the men were acquitted because there was no direct eyewitness to the crime. Ahmadiyya community members stated Qadir was killed because of his faith.

Civil society organizations and media outlets said that armed sectarian groups connected to organizations banned by the government, including the Tehreek-e Taliban Pakistan and the once-banned anti-Shia group Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan, continued to perpetrate violence and other abuses against religious minorities. Groups designated as terrorist organizations by the United States and other governments, such as ISIS, also committed violent acts. Among the targets of these attacks were Shia Muslims, particularly the predominantly Shia Hazara community. According to the SATP, there were four sectarian attacks by armed groups during 2022, compared with five sectarian attacks reported in 2021. Data on sectarian attacks varied because no standardized definition existed of what constituted a sectarian attack among reporting organizations. According to journalists, when reporting on attacks that had a suspected sectarian motive, media often refrained from reporting the victim's sectarian identity to avoid stoking tensions.

In an unverified press release, the terrorist splinter group Lashkar-e-Khorasan claimed responsibility for the January 31 shooting of Pastor William Siraj and Reverend Patrick Naeem in Peshawar. Analysts said this group comprised former Lashkar-e-Jhangvi members who pledged allegiance to Islamic State – Khorasan Province (ISIS-K).

On March 4, a suicide attacker detonated himself inside an *Imambargah* (Shia place of worship that is distinct from a mosque) during Friday prayers, killing at least 62 worshippers and injuring 197, in the Koocha Risaldar area of Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The ISIS-K claimed responsibility for the attack.

On May 15, two Sikh men, Ranjeet Singh and Kanwaljeet Singh, were shot dead in Peshawar by unidentified men who fled the scene on a motorcycle. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) police said the shooting appeared to be a terrorist attack; Chief Minister Mahmood Khan called it a “bid to harm inter-religious harmony.” Prime Minister Sharif condemned the killing. Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah told media, “The KP government has terribly failed at protecting the minorities.”

On August 8, unknown assailants indiscriminately opened fire in a Christian neighborhood in Mastung, Balochistan, killing one person and injuring three teenage boys. According to media reports, the Islamic State Pakistan Province, an affiliate of ISIS-K, claimed responsibility “for targeting a group of infidel Christians.”

On November 3, a gunman identified as Naveed Ahmad shot and wounded former Prime Minister Khan during a protest march in Wazirabad, Punjab. One protester died and 14 others sustained injuries in the attack. Police arrested the assailant and charged him with terrorism, murder, and attempted murder. During a videotaped confession released by police, Ahmad stated he attempted to kill Khan for “claiming prophethood” and “making noise during calls for prayers.” According to police, a search of Naveed's telephone showed he shared many videos of deceased conservative Islamic scholar and Tanzeem-e-Islami leader Israr Ahmad, as well as of far-right TLP leader Saad Hussain Rizvi. Khan disputed police findings that the attack was religiously motivated and said it was part of a politically motivated conspiracy against him.

On October 11, three Muslim men, including Mohsin Jamali and Takri Lashari, reportedly lured a 13-year-old Sikh boy into an isolated area and sexually assaulted him at gunpoint. Sindh police arrested the two men, but they subsequently escaped the Civil Lines Police Station in Jacobabad and had not been rearrested as of year's end.

In its 2023 *World Watch List* report, which covers events in 2022, the international NGO Open Doors stated, "Christians are considered second-class citizens and are discriminated against in every aspect of life" in the country. According to the report, Christians continued to be subject to violence and harassment, and it noted, "Although there were no major attacks against churches during the year, there are almost constant attacks against individuals." The report highlighted that blasphemy laws continued to be used to target Christians with false allegations, Christian women and girls were targeted for kidnapping, forced marriage, and conversion to Islam, and authorities remain apathetic, failing to adequately protect minorities or punish those who persecute them.

Civil society activists and media continued to report incidents of 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. According to the NGOs Center for Legal Aid Assistance and Settlement (CLAAS) and the Pakistan Center for Law and Justice, there were also reports of religious minority women being physically attacked by men. On January 17, at the Karachi Press Club, human rights organizations protested the continuing abductions of young women around the country. The protest followed the abduction of a 14-year-old Christian girl in Lahore by her 45-year-old Muslim neighbor on January 4. According to media reports, the girl had been converted to Islam to marry her abductor, Muhammad Ali Khan Ghauri. In another incident, on January 7, a 16-year-old Christian girl from Okara in Punjab Province was abducted from her school and allegedly raped by a Muslim man before he abandoned her, unconscious, in front of her house.

According to the NGO Human Rights Focus Pakistan, on March 13, a 19-year-old Christian woman from Faisalabad was taken on her way to school. Her family filed a complaint with police, who named Muslim Muhammad Rashid as the main suspect along with two other Muslims who, they said, kidnapped the young woman to force her to convert and marry Rashid. No arrests had been made by year's end.

On August 20 and 21, members of the Sikh community protested the alleged abduction, forced conversion, and forced marriage of a Sikh woman to a Muslim man in Buner, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Family members searched for teacher Dina Kumari, who, they said, was engaged to marry a fellow Sikh, when she did not return from work on August 20. Police located Kumari on August 21 and brought her before a local court, where she stated she had converted to Islam and married her neighbor, a Muslim man, of her own free will.

On November 23, the Sindh High Court ordered that a minor girl be returned to her Christian parents and live with them until age 18. The girl had reportedly been abducted and forcibly married to her Muslim neighbor in 2020 when she was 13 years old. In 2021, the court initially accepted her testimony, which her parents said was coerced, that she was 19 years old and had married and converted of her own free will. She was then sent to a women's shelter pending medical tests to determine her true age. When the medical tests determined that she was a minor, her parents successfully petitioned the court for her return. The girl lived in a women's shelter until she was ordered released.

Members of civil society continued to report that converts from Islam lived in varying degrees of secrecy for fear of violent retribution from family members or society at large. In April, media reported that the European Court of Human Rights halted the deportation from Switzerland of a Pakistani convert to Christianity on the grounds that he was likely to face persecution if returned to Pakistan. A lawyer representing the plaintiff, listed only as M.A.M. in court documents and the media report, told the court, "Converts face not only socio-political marginalization and institutionalized discrimination, but also blasphemy charges, arrest, long prison sentences, and vigilante mob violence."

Representatives of the Kalash, an indigenous group in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, continued to report their youth were under pressure from Muslim schoolteachers and others to convert from their traditional beliefs.

Throughout the year, Islamic organizations with various political affiliations held conferences and rallies to support the doctrine of Khatm-e-Nabuwat. English and local-language media often covered the events that featured anti-Ahmadi rhetoric that Ahmadiyya community representatives said could incite violence against Ahmadis.

Members of religious minority communities continued to report cruel, inhumane, or degrading treatment, and illegal confinement due to their faith. Ahmadis continued to report widespread societal harassment and discrimination against community members, including physical attacks, destruction of homes and personal property, and threats intended to force Ahmadis to abandon their jobs or towns.

There were also reports of attacks on religious minorities' holy places, cemeteries, and religious symbols. For example, Catholic media recorded two incidents of desecration of churches in Okara and Lahore, Punjab. In the first incident, several armed men entered the St. Camillus de Lellis Church in Okara in January, tied up the watchman, and ransacked the sanctuary before escaping. Police charged four persons with blasphemy for the attack, but the church pastor believed the primary motivation was burglary.

In a second incident, a young Muslim climbed on the roof of the One in Christ Church in Lahore in March and sat atop the cross yelling, "Allahu Akbar." Catholic media reported that police arrested and released the man, then rearrested him after members of the local Christian community filed blasphemy charges against him. CLAAS reported police arrested and charged him under penal code Section 295-A (hurting religious feelings). Following this incident, Samson Salamat, chairman of civil society group Rwadari Tehreek (The Movement for Religious Tolerance), told media, "The citizens belonging to minority communities and their religions are considered inferior. One could imagine the violent reaction and level of destruction if a non-Muslim was behind such an act." According to Salamat, "Lynchings and desecration of churches, temples and minority properties were a normal phenomenon as were false blasphemy allegations against minorities." He said, "Sadly, the youth (in this incident) has been nurtured on hatred for Christians. The nursery of hate mongering must be shut down."

In June, unidentified individuals vandalized a Hindu temple in Karachi, according to media reports. The Foreign Ministry said that an investigation was underway, and that those who attacked the temple and fled the scene "will not escape justice and the government will deal with them with the full force of law." Media reported that Arindam Bagchi, spokesman for the Indian Ministry of External Affairs, expressed concern over the vandalism, saying it was "another act in the systematic persecution of

religious minorities” in Pakistan. In comments to the media, the Foreign Ministry rejected Bagchi’s allegation, saying such violence was taking place against minority Muslims in India.

On August 22, unidentified persons desecrated 16 graves of Ahmadis in a walled graveyard in Faisalabad District, in Punjab.

On April 29, 14 armed men attacked the Presbyterian Global Passion School in Sheikhpura, Punjab. Media outlets reported the attackers beat the staff, threw chairs at praying children, damaged school property and vehicles, and demanded monthly extortion payments from the school. Principal Simon Peter Kaleem said to the media, “Many of our religious and political leaders, while visiting other countries, say that minorities and Christians are safe in Pakistan. After what happened to us today, I will never say that.” He also said, “A few among the neighboring Muslim community have always tried to stop us from praying. They literally demanded stopping the noise at the ‘*kanjar khana*’ [brothel]. We want to be treated equally. Please pray for us.” Police arrested three men in the case.

On October 3, media reported that members of the local Hindu community closed their shops and marched on the roads of Kalat, Balochistan to protest what they stated was the desecration of the remains of a Hindu woman at a crematorium and to demand that police find and arrest the perpetrators. The marchers said that the woman’s remains were still in the crematorium when unidentified persons broke in at night, removed the body, and burned it outside. The protestors said the gate of the crematorium had been stolen in the past and, despite complaints to the district administration, no steps were taken to safeguard the facility from such incidents.

Christian religious freedom activists continued to report widespread discrimination against Christians in private employment. They said Christians continued to have difficulty finding jobs other than those involving menial labor, with some advertisements for menial jobs specifying they were open only to Christian applicants.

On September 30, Ahmadi activists reported that TLP cleric Muhammad Naeem Chattha Qadri called his supporters to carry out attacks on pregnant Ahmadi women to prevent new Ahmadis from being born. Qadri also called for all Ahmadis to be killed and said, “There is but one punishment for blasphemers, decapitation.” The government did not react to or take action against Qadri.

Observers reported that English-language media continued to cover issues facing religious minorities in an objective manner, but vernacular print and broadcast media outlets continued to publish and broadcast anti-Ahmadi rhetoric. Ahmadiyya Muslim community representatives stated that the Urdu-language press frequently printed hate speech in news stories and editorials, some of which could be considered as inciting anti-Ahmadi violence. Inflammatory anti-Ahmadi rhetoric continued to exist on social media and was at times spread by senior members of mainstream political parties. Community members stated clerics routinely delivered anti-Ahmadi sermons in mosques.

In February, the Urdu-language news website *HumSub* featured an article that accused Ahmadis of “anti-Pakistan conspiracies” and justified demolishing Ahmadi mosques in Karachi. The Karachi-based Urdu daily *Ummat* coined the term “apostasy house” to refer to Ahmadi mosques in its reporting and used it extensively throughout the year.

On September 7, most daily Urdu newspapers again published reports and articles to mark the 1974 amendment to the constitution that declared Ahmadis as non-Muslims. Op-eds by religious scholars published in these papers referred to Ahmadis as “evil” and a “curse” created to undermine the “values

of Islam” and the “sovereignty of Pakistan.” Leading Urdu newspapers also published editorials and articles paying homage to the politicians and clerics who helped enact the amendment.

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.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

The Ambassador, Consuls General, other embassy officers, and visiting senior U.S. officials, including the Counselor of the Department of State, engaged government officials and senior advisors to the Prime Minister, including officials from the Ministry of Law and Justice, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and senior members of the Senate and National Assembly, to urge them to make progress on blasphemy laws and laws concerning Ahmadi Muslims, better protect members of religious minority communities, improve sectarian relations, and encourage interfaith respect.

On December 15, the deputy to the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom met in Washington with representatives of the Human Rights and Minority Affairs Department (HR&MA) of the Government of Punjab, to discuss shared priorities and ways to deepen engagements. An official from the HR&MA discussed the department’s initiatives to improve protection of religious minorities and promote interfaith harmony through new draft policies that were being developed with embassy assistance, advocacy outreach and trainings, and public-private partnerships.

In August on the country’s National Minority Day, the Ambassador met religious minority community leaders in Karachi to promote interfaith cooperation, religious tolerance, and diversity.

In September, the Ambassador met with interfaith leaders and scholars at Badshahi Mosque to promote peaceful religious coexistence. The Ambassador highlighted the U.S. government’s commitment to religious freedom and discussed efforts in the country to improve tolerance, inclusion, and harmony. The group attending the meeting included representatives of the Christian, Hindu, and Sikh communities, as well as the Grand Imam of Badshahi Mosque and scholars from various branches of Islam.

In September, the Counselor of the State Department visited Jamia Islamia Clifton Madrassah in Karachi, which was operating as a distribution center for humanitarian relief for flood victims. He was joined by the Karachi Administrator and an interfaith group of local religious leaders with whom he discussed how assistance packages would directly aid the people of the province, including minority religious communities, and the need for religious unity during the difficult time. This event and its messages were widely covered by local media outlets and broadcast around the country.

Embassy officers met with civil society leaders, experts, and journalists to collect information on religious freedom issues not covered in the media, stress the need to protect the rights of religious minorities, and offer support to victims of religion-based abuses. 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 among religious groups and enhance dialogue.

In November, an officer from the Consulate General in Lahore met with the Hindu community in Rahim Yar Khan to discuss the continuing impact of the 2021 attack on the Siddhivinayak Hindu Temple, religious discrimination, and relations with the majority-Muslim community in the area.

The embassy and consulates general highlighted the principles of religious freedom and examples of interfaith dialogue in the United States on their social media platforms throughout the year. The embassy and consulates general posted items commemorating Interfaith Harmony month in April, National Minorities Day in August, and interfaith religious holidays, including Eid, Diwali, Holi, and Christmas, which generated thousands of positive responses.

The embassy and consulates general sponsored outreach activities such as speakers and workshops to promote peacebuilding among religious and community leaders. The embassy and consulates general in Lahore, Karachi, and Peshawar held several events to promote religious freedom. On April 4, officers at the Consulate General in Lahore arranged an interfaith iftar dinner during Ramadan to promote peacebuilding and religious harmony among leading scholars, speakers, and activists from different faith communities.

In February, the Consulate General in Lahore and the Department of State's international student advisor program conducted a virtual discussion, "Mental Health in Religious Minority Students," to promote the well-being of Ahmadi, Christian, Hindu, and other religious minority students in secondary schools across the country. The event brought together clinical psychologists and high school counselors to discuss how religious minorities in the country could be psychologically affected in academic institutions. The discussion ranged from issues such as bullying, harmful stereotyping, bias from instructors and school administration to the negative influence of media and social media. The audience included students, school counselors, and parents.

In April, the Consulate General in Lahore sponsored four women *ulemas* (Muslim religious scholars) from Punjab to travel to the United States as part of an exchange program to promote religious tolerance. The program focused on how to promote tolerance and inclusion among students and teachers in madrassahs, secondary schools, and higher education institutions. After their return to Pakistan, the four conducted workshops and training sessions on promoting religious tolerance for their academic colleagues and other professionals from the wider community.

In April, the Consulate General in Karachi and the Department of State's international student advisor program hosted a virtual discussion with three Pakistani students currently studying in the United States who spoke on religious freedom and campus support systems available to Muslim students in the United States. More than 300 students from around Pakistan participated and learned from the three in the United States about societal values of interfaith harmony and respect for other faith traditions.

An embassy-supported program engaged youth in Karachi and Lahore from across religious dividing lines in dialogues, network building, and intercommunal initiatives to train them to promote inter- and intra-communal respect in their communities and to increase the visibility of youth championing peaceful coexistence and the rights of all people.

Another embassy-supported program assessed the justice system's effectiveness in responding to the legal needs of, and protecting the legal rights of, minority communities. The program also provided minority religious communities legal assistance and support.

The embassy supported multiple activities engaging provincial ministers from Punjab and legislators from Punjab and Sindh to promote tolerance and diversity and mitigate religious intolerance. These efforts aimed to enhance mutual understanding, integration, and collaboration among communities representing different religious schools and religious groups.

On November 30, 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 severe violations of religious freedom and issued a waiver of the sanctions that accompany the designation in the national interest of the United States. On December 14, Pakistani Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari responded to the CPC designation stating, "It does seem that this is a slightly biased and politicized list." Pakistan was first designated a CPC in 2018.

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