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2021 Report on International Religious Freedom: Pakistan

OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM / JUNE 2, 2022

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Executive Summary

The constitution establishes Islam as the state religion and requires all provisions of the law to be consistent with Islam. The constitution states, "Subject to law, public order, and morality, every citizen shall have the right to profess, practice, and propagate his religion." It also states, "A person of the Qadiani group or the Lahori group (who call themselves Ahmadis) is a non-Muslim." According to NGOs, police failed to protect religious minorities and those accused of blasphemy. 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 the Center for Social Justice (CSJ), a national nongovernmental organization (NGO), 84 persons were accused of blasphemy in 2021, a significant decrease from the 199 individuals accused in 2020. Other NGOs also assessed 2021 had seen a decrease in blasphemy cases compared with the previous year, but they could not verify actual case numbers. According to civil society reports, at least 16 of those charged with blasphemy during the year received death sentences. The Ahmadiyya community reported that two of the blasphemy cases registered against Ahmadis during the year could result in the death penalty. They reported that the cumulative number of Ahmadis charged under Pakistan's blasphemy laws since 2019 was 61. 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. Ahmadi Muslims also remained barred from representation on the National Commission for Minorities within the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provincial governments passed a series of laws targeting Ahmadi Muslim beliefs. The Ahmadiyya community reported that police registered 49 cases against Ahmadi Muslims under these laws during the year. Throughout the year, some government officials and politicians around the country engaged in anti-Ahmadi rhetoric and attended events that Ahmadi Muslims said incited violence against members of their community.

NGOs expressed concern that authorities often failed to intervene in instances of societal violence against religious minorities due to fear of retaliation, inadequate staff, or apathy.

NGOs reported perpetrators of societal violence and abuses against religious minorities often faced no legal consequences due to a lack of follow-through by law enforcement, bribes offered by the accused, and pressure on victims to drop cases. The government took some measures to protect religious minorities, including establishing a special police unit in all provinces to protect religious minorities and their places of worship. Police and security forces enhanced security measures during religious holidays in consultation with religious leaders.

Throughout the year, unidentified individuals and mobs targeted and killed Christians, Hindus, Ahmadi Muslims, Sunni Muslims, and Shia Muslims in attacks believed to be motivated by religion or accusations of blasphemy. On December 3, several hundred Muslim workers from a factory in Sialkot, Punjab, attacked Priantha Kumara, a Sri Lankan Christian manager of the factory, for allegedly committing blasphemy by removing far-right extremist Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) political party posters that included Islamic prayers.

Attackers beat, kicked, and stoned him to death and set his corpse on fire, according to media reports. Prime Minister Imran Khan said the attack was "horrific" and ordered a high-level inquiry. Media reported that authorities arrested more than 100 individuals after the attack.

On March 25, six Sunni Muslims died and seven were injured in a Shia-majority area when assailants opened fire on a passenger van traveling from Gilgit to Naltar. On February 11, a teenager shot and killed an Ahmadi homeopathic doctor, Abdul Qadir, in Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. On September 2, unidentified assailants shot and killed Maqsood Ahmad, a dual British-Pakistani citizen and Ahmadi Muslim in Nankana Sahib, Punjab. On August 19, three persons died, and 59 others were injured in a grenade attack on a Shia procession in Bahawalnagar, Punjab. It was the third sectarian attack in the area in two months. Arr

sectarian groups, including factions of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), and ISIS-Khorasan (ISIS-K), continued to stage attacks targeting Shia Muslims, including the

predominantly Shia ethnic Hazara community. According to the South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP), the number of sectarian attacks and killings by armed groups increased compared with 2020, 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. Sunni groups held large sectarian rallies in Peshawar and Karachi in September and October, with speakers warning religious minorities, including Shia and Ahmadi Muslims, of dire consequences if anything they said was deemed blasphemous against the Prophet Mohammed's companions. 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. The Center for Social Justice recorded 41 cases of forced conversions through October 31. There continued to be reports of attacks on Ahmadi, Hindu, and Christian holy places, cemeteries, and religious symbols. The government continued to implement its National Action Plan against terrorism, by countering sectarian hate speech and extremism and by conducting military and law enforcement operations against violent groups. According to Ahmadi civil society organizations, however, the government failed to restrict advertisements or speeches inciting anti-Ahmadi violence, as provided for in the National Action Plan. Civil society groups continued to express concerns about the safety of religious minorities. Multiple civil society groups and faith community leaders stated the government had increased efforts to provide enhanced security at religious minority places of worship.

Senior Department of State officials, including the Deputy Secretary of State, the Charge d'Affaires, and Consuls General, as well as other embassy officers, met with government officials and senior advisors to the Prime Minister, and officials from the Ministry of Law and Justice, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, and Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony to discuss religious freedom issues. These included blasphemy law reform; laws concerning Ahmadi Muslims; the need to better protect all religious minorities; sectarian relations; and religious respect. Embassy 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. Visiting U.S. government officials met with religious minority community representatives, parliamentarians, human rights activists, and members of the federal cabinet to highlight concerns regarding the treatment of religious minority communities, the application of blasphemy laws, and other forms of discrimination on the basis of religion. The embassy and

consulates 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 15, 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 interests of the United States. Pakistan was first designated as a CPC in 2018.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 238.2 million (midyear 2021). 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 15-20 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 Zoroastrians. 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 states, "Subject to law, public order, and morality, every citizen shall have the right to profess, practice, and propagate his religion."

According to the constitution, every citizen has the right to freedom of speech, subject to "reasonable restrictions in the interest of the glory of Islam," as stipulated in the penal code. According to the penal code, the punishments for persons convicted of blasphemy include the death penalty for "defiling the Prophet Mohammed," life imprisonment for "defiling, damaging, or desecrating the Quran," and up to 10 years of 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 2016 Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA), the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony is responsible for reviewing internet traffic and reporting blasphemous or offensive content to the Pakistan Telecommunications Authority for possible removal or to the Federal Investigative Agency (FIA) for possible criminal prosecution.

The constitution defines "Muslim" as a person who "believes in the unity and oneness of Almighty Allah, in the absolute and unqualified finality of the Prophethood of Mohammed... 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 Mohammed." 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 the 1997 Antiterrorism Act, to try cases involving violent crimes, terrorist activities, and

acts or speech deemed by the government to foment religious hatred, including blasphemy.

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

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

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

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

By law, madrassahs are prohibited from teaching or encouraging sectarian or religious hatred or violence. *Wafaqs* (independent academic boards) register seminaries, regulate curricula, and issue degrees. The five wafaqs each represent major streams of Islamic thought in the country: Bareilvi, Deobandi, Shia, Ahle Hadith, and the Jamaat-i-Islami, which is considered ultraconservative. The wafaqs operate through an umbrella group, Ittehad-e-Tanzeemat-e-Madaris Pakistan, to represent their interests to the government. The government requires all madrassahs to register with the Ministry of Education in addition to registration with one of 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 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. Some personal laws regulating marriage, divorce, and inheritance for minority communities date from prepartition British legislation.

The constitution establishes a Federal Shariat Court (FSC) composed of Muslim judges to examine and decide whether any law or provision is "repugnant to the injunctions of Islam." The constitution gives the FSC the power to examine a law of its own accord or at the request of the government or a private citizen. The constitution requires the government to amend the law as directed by the court. The constitution also grants the FSC "revisional jurisdiction" (the power to review of its own accord) 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 the parliament and provincial assemblies, as to "the ways and means of enabling and encouraging Muslims to order their lives in accordance with the principles of Islam." The constitution further empowers the council to advise the legislative and executive branches when they choose to refer a question to the council as to whether a proposed law is or is not "repugnant to the injunctions of Islam."

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 treatment of religious institutions. The National Commission on Human Rights (NCHR), an independent government-funded agency that reports to parliament, is required to receive petitions,

conduct investigations, and request remediation of human rights abuses. The NCHR is also mandated to monitor the government's implementation of human rights 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.

According to the constitution, there shall be no discrimination on the basis of religion in appointing individuals to government service, provided they are otherwise qualified. There is a 5 percent minimum quota for hiring religious minorities (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 governmental educational institution. According to regulations, the only factors affecting admission to government 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 Mohammed is the final prophet. Non-Muslims are required to have the head of their local religious communities verify their religious affiliation. There is no provision in the law for atheists.

The National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) designates religious affiliation on passports and requires religious information on national identity card and passport applications. Those wishing to be listed as Muslims must swear they believe Mohammed is the final prophet and must denounce the Ahmadiyya movement's founder as a false prophet and his followers as non-Muslim. There is no option to state "no religion." National identity cards are required for all citizens upon reaching the age of 18. Identification cards are used for voting, pension disbursement, social and financial inclusion programs, and other services.

The constitution requires the President and Prime Minister to be 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 Mohammed is the final prophet of Islam. This requirement prohibits Ahmadi Muslims from holding elected office, as they recognize a prophet subsequent to the Prophet Mohammed.

The constitution reserves seats for non-Muslim members in the national and provincial assemblies. The 342-member National Assembly has 10 reserved seats for non-Muslims. The

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

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

GOVERNMENT PRACTICES

According to NGOs, police failed to protect religious minorities and those accused of blasphemy, including a member of the Hindu religious minority, Dodo Bheel, who was physically abused and killed on June 30 by security guards at the Sindh Engro Coal Mining Company where he worked. Authorities arrested the two guards involved, who were not Hindu, on July 14 and charged them with murder. Dodo Bheel’s family filed murder charges against the mining firm’s security contractor. In August, a fact-finding mission led by the Ministry of Human Rights recommended charges against police in Sindh Province for mismanaging the case, according to media reports. A Sindh High Court judge directed district authorities to produce a report on the incident and members of the ministry’s fact-finding mission said Dodo Bheel’s postmortem report showed 19 injuries inflicted with a blunt object. The investigation also revealed that security guards kept some of his Hindu coworkers in illegal detention for 14 days and physically abused them prior to handing them over to police. The police allegedly asked their families not to disclose what had happened to the injured men. On July 1, members of the local Hindu community blocked the mine access road and carried Bheel’s body in protest. Protests spread to other cities in Sindh after authorities arrested 150 members of the Hindu community on terrorism charges for protesting, although the protests were reportedly peaceful. On November 22, media reported Bheel’s brother appeared in court to withdraw murder charges against the mining firm’s security company. Media reported that his family sought to reach an out of court settlement with the mining firm.

company. At year's end, the government had brought no charges against police, despite the recommendations of the fact-finding mission.

The NGO Center for Social Justice (CSJ) reported authorities charged and imprisoned 84 individuals in 2021 for blasphemy, compared with the 199 CSJ reported in 2020, when NGOs reported an uptick in blasphemy cases lodged against Shia Muslims due to heightened Sunni-Shia tension. Of these 84 individuals, Sunni and Shia Muslims made up 54 percent (CSJ did not include separate Sunni and Shia figures), Ahmadi Muslims 30 percent, Hindus 8 percent, and Christians 8 percent. At least 16 persons accused of blasphemy around the country during the year received death sentences, but none were carried out. The Ahmadiyya community reported that two of the blasphemy cases against Ahmadis in 2021 were registered under section 295-C of the penal code, which carries the death penalty. They reported that the cumulative number of Ahmadis charged under Pakistan's blasphemy laws since 2019 was 61. Leaders from other NGOs agreed the actual number of blasphemy cases involving Ahmadis 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 never executed anyone specifically for blasphemy. According to civil society reports, 81 percent of cases registered during the year against individuals accused of blasphemy were in Punjab.

In January, media reported that the Anti-Terrorism Court in Islamabad sentenced three men to death for sharing "blasphemous content on social media," and a fourth man to 10 year's imprisonment in a case that began in 2017. According to security officials, two of the men – Rana Nouman Rafaqat and Abdul Waheed – operated fake profiles and disseminated blasphemous material on social media, while a third man – Nasir Ahmad – uploaded blasphemous videos to a YouTube channel. The fourth man – Professor Anwaar Ahmed – was charged with voicing blasphemous views during a lecture at the Islamabad Model College where he was an Urdu teacher. Police took Ahmed into custody and fined him 100,000 rupees (\$560), but the other three were in hiding at year's end.

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 Muslim citizens charged under PECA and facing blasphemy charges 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 Qu. The judge ordered police authorities to submit a report stating why they had not

implemented the 2019 verdict to ensure that only “authorized entities” published the Quran and acted against the accused and those publishing “unauthentic” copies of the Quran. The hearing was postponed on November 30, the case remained ongoing at year’s end with the accused free on bail.

The trial of the killers of Tahir Naseem, a U.S. citizen Ahmadi Muslim killed in a courtroom in August 2020 while on trial for blasphemy, was ongoing before the Anti-Terrorism Court in Peshawar at year’s end.

On September 27, a court in Lahore fined and sentenced Ahmadi Salma Tanveer, a former school principal, to death for blasphemy under section 295-C of the penal code for distributing writings denying the “finality of the Prophet” in 2013. The court said, “It is proved beyond reasonable doubt that the accused Salma Tanveer wrote and distributed the writings which are derogatory in respect of Holy Prophet Mohammed.” Police registered a blasphemy case against Tanveer for allegedly using derogatory remarks against Islam, based on the complaint of Qari Iftikhar Ahmad Raza, a prayer leader of a local mosque. Tanveer remained in prison in Lahore at year’s end, where she had been since 2013.

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; Junaid Hafeez; Mubasher, Ghulam, and Ehsan Ahmed; and Stephen Masih – remained in prison awaiting action on their appeals. In all these cases, judges repeatedly delayed hearings, adjourned hearings without hearing arguments, or sent appeals to other judicial benches. Civil society and legal sources said judges were generally hesitant to decide blasphemy cases due to fear of violent retribution.

In February, the courts granted Ahmadi Muslim Ramzan Bibi bail on her charge of blasphemy, 10 months after her arrest. 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 Moslem 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. Her trial remained pending at year’s end.

In March, a prominent Sufi cleric from rural Sindh and his followers threatened the life of Sindhi fiction writer Amar Jaleel, accusing him of committing blasphemy during a 2017

literature festival after a video clip of Jaleel reading one of his short stories during that festival appeared on social media on March 28. Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) and Jamiat-e-Ulema-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) political party figures led the public campaign against Jaleel, supported by right-wing newspaper *Daily Ummat*. On April 3, Sufi cleric Pir Umar Jan Sarhandi called for Jaleel's death and offered money to anyone who carried out an assassination. Social media users demanded Sindh authorities arrest Sarhandi, but they took no action. The Sindh government promised that provincial authorities would not file blasphemy charges against Jaleel. National media reported, however, that the FIA launched an investigation of Jaleel using cybercrime laws at the request of the TLP.

On April 9, police filed blasphemy cases against two Christian nurses of the District Headquarters Hospital. Protesting hospital employees alleged that the two committed blasphemy by removing a sticker with a sacred Islamic inscription from a cupboard in the hospital. According to media reports, the police locked one of the nurses inside a police van to keep her safe from the protesters. In a similar incident, on January 28, police filed a blasphemy case against another Christian nurse, Tabitha Gill, at a maternity hospital in Karachi for "defiling the Prophet Mohammed" after she reportedly said she would pray for someone in the hospital. Coworkers at the hospital accused Gill of blasphemy after an argument and were seen slapping and beating her in a video that went viral on social media, but none of those seen in the video striking her were arrested or charged. An initial police investigation cleared Gill of any wrongdoing, but authorities subsequently registered a blasphemy case against her when a mob gathered outside the local police station demanding that she be recharged under blasphemy laws.

On August 7, police arrested Qaiser Zada, a transgender person, and her two brothers on charges of desecrating the Quran in Havelian, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Media reports say a witness saw Zada refuse sexual advances from a local Islamic scholar and was arrested along with her brothers after local residents accused them of burning a copy of the Quran. According to media reports, the residents beat Zada before handing her over to police. She and her brothers remained in custody at year's end.

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, 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 TLP, 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. These observers said the general refusal of lower courts to hold timely hearings or acquit those accused of blasphemy persisted due to fear of reprisal and vigilantism. Legal observers also reported judges and magistrates often delayed or continued trials indefinitely to avoid confrontation with, or violence from, groups provoking protests.

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 an objective investigation 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 they had been charged formally so 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 often did not file charges against individuals who made false blasphemy accusations.

During the year, courts overturned some blasphemy convictions upon appeal and acquitted others after the accused had spent years in prison. On June 3, the Lahore High Court (LHC) acquitted and released a Christian couple, Shafqat Emmanuel and Shagufta Masih, from Punjab's Toba Tek Singh District. Authorities arrested them in 2013 for sending text messages to the complainants that the complainants said were blasphemous. In April 2014, a lower court had sentenced the couple to death and fined them 100,000 rupees (\$560) each.

There were reported cases of government intervention and assistance from courts and law enforcement in situations of attempted kidnapping and forced conversion. Enforcement action against alleged perpetrators was rare, however. Multiple cases of forced marriage and conversion of Christian women and girls were reported in Punjab. On February 16, a court in Faisalabad ordered the release of a 13-year-old Christian girl who, according to media reports, had been abducted at the age of 12, forcibly converted to Islam, and married against her will to a 45-year-old Muslim man in June 2020. Police rescued her in December 2020 and later moved her to a government-run shelter. A court in Faisalabad later allowed her to rejoin her family. Media reported that police dropped the investigation of the three Muslim men accused of abducting her and keeping her in chains for five months in 2020.

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCPP) reported forced conversions of young women of minority faiths, often lower-caste Hindu girls from rural Sindh, continued to occur along with multiple cases of forced marriages, child marriages, and forced conversions. In March, the Hindu community in Tangwani protested what they said was the abduction and forced conversion to Islam of a 13-year-old girl. A video of the girl went viral on social media in which she was seen sitting among men, who were shooting videos and taking photographs of her with their mobile phones. The girl's father filed a case with local police and reported that her abductors and their influential supporters from a local mosque had set his house on fire after he refused to withdraw the case against them. On March 16, police rescued the girl and presented her before a court, which ordered that she be placed in a shelter. Police issued no charges on the arson allegation.

On July 26, a court in Badin, Sindh ordered police to reunite a young Hindu girl with her parents after her abduction, forced marriage, and forced conversion to Islam. Police had earlier rescued the girl from the illegal custody of a Muslim man after she posted a video widely seen on social media in which she was crying and pleading to be reunited with her parents. Following the court's order, police arrested her purported husband, Qasim Khaskheli, and his two brothers, and charged them for their alleged aiding and abetting the rape, kidnapping, torture, and intimidation of the girl. She also declared that she had not converted to Islam and stated false documents were prepared by her purported husband. Police returned the girl to her parents in July and later released those arrested in the case.

Religious minorities and several organizations protested the government's response to alleged cases of forced marriage and forced conversion, noting such incidents continue to happen regularly in all provinces. On May 21, Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Religious Affairs and the Middle East Tahir Ashrafi stated that incidents of forced conversions and marriages had been rarely reported during the previous seven months. Several NGOs tracking forced conversions criticized Ashrafi's statement, noting that forced conversions and marriages remained prevalent and demanded the government do more to protect victims of forced marriage and conversion.

On October 13, a parliamentary committee to protect religious minorities from forced conversions rejected a draft bill proposing an anti-forced conversion law after the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Inter-faith Harmony opposed it. Lawmakers from religious minority communities protested the decision and requested the government review it. During a meeting of the Parliamentary Committee to Protect Minorities from Forced Conversion, Minister of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony Noor-ul-Haq Qadri said the "environment

is unfavorable” for formulating a law against forced conversions and warned that approval of the draft could disrupt peace in the country and “make minorities more vulnerable.” Qadri also urged the Prime Minister to “take other steps” to stop the conversions but did not suggest what those steps should be. Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs Ali Muhammad Khan said setting a minimum age for marriage in the forced conversion bill “goes against Islam and the Constitution of Pakistan.”

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 religious holidays such as Ashura (Schedule 4). On August 11, the Sindh provincial government barred 309 “firebrand” speakers and religious scholars from leaving their home districts for 60 days to avoid violent disturbances during Shia commemorations in the month of Muharram, more than double the number barred in 2020. These 309 individuals included both Shia and Sunni clerics who in the past had made controversial statements that the ministry said led to sectarian tensions. The Rawalpindi district administration banned 39 Islamic Ulema religious figures belonging to different sects from entering the district during Muharram, stating this was in order to maintain peace and interfaith harmony during the commemorations and related processions held there during Muharram.

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 clerics on the Ministry of Interior’s Schedule 4 listing to keep the peace. Shia community representatives, however, accused authorities of bias by restricting their religious ceremonies and arresting community members. In October, Shia leaders said Karachi police beat and harassed mourners participating in a religious procession during the Shia *Chehlum* holiday.

According to Ahmadiyya community leaders, authorities continued to target and harass Ahmadi Muslims for blasphemy, violations of “anti-Ahmadi laws,” and other crimes. Ahmadiyya leaders stated the ambiguous wording of the legal provision forbidding Ahmadis from directly or indirectly identifying themselves as Muslims enabled officials to bring charges against members of the community for using the standard Islamic greeting or for naming their children Mohammed. Ahmadi leaders said that during elections, their community members were more exposed to threats and physical intimidation, because authorities maintained the names of voters who registered as Ahmadi on separate voter lists. Many Ahmadis therefore continued their longstanding practice of boycotting elections, according to

the leaders. 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 those councils considered Ahmadis to be outside the authority of the Muslim Family Law of 1961.

On October 26, the Punjab Assembly passed a resolution requiring a declaration that Mohammed was the final prophet of Islam, which runs counter to Ahmadi beliefs, be included on government documents to register an Islamic marriage with the state.

In June, according to reports from the Ahmadiyya Muslim community, police who arrived at the scene of a fight between Sunnis and Ahmadis in Sheikupura District, Punjab, took no action to break it up. The fight erupted when a group of Sunni Muslims attacked and blocked the funeral procession of an Ahmadi woman on its way to the cemetery. The attackers, comprised of local villagers and led by clerics, opposed the woman's burial, arguing the cemetery belonged to "Muslims" only. According to bystanders, many suffered injuries in the fight. Eventually, the Ahmadiyya Muslim community was able to bury the woman in that cemetery.

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 to govern Christian marriages nationwide, because the existing regulation dated from 1872. 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 covers 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. In 2020, the Sindh provincial government began to implement the act, and NADRA began registering Hindu marriages in Sindh, according to Hindu community activists. Some Hindu activists reported

implementation of the law remained slow and officials who could solemnize Hindu marriages were not being registered with the government.

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 said 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.

In March, hundreds of pilgrims clashed with police while trying to enter a shrine closed by the Sindh provincial government due to COVID-19 restrictions. Police said the pilgrims broke open the main gate of the shrine of Lal Shahbaz Qalandar, a 13th-century mystic Sufi saint, located in the town of Sehwan, Sindh. The crowds attacked police and threw stones, police officer Mohammad Mushtaq said. Several police suffered minor injuries. Investigations were ongoing at year’s end.

Some religious minority leaders continued to state the system of selecting minority parliamentarians through the internal deliberations of mainstream parties resulted in the appointment of party stalwarts or those who could afford to “buy the seats,” rather than legislators who genuinely represented minority communities. Others said parliamentarians occupying reserved seats had little influence in their parties and in the National Assembly because they did not have a voting constituency. Women from religious minority communities criticized political parties for only nominating men to seats reserved for religious minorities in all legislative bodies and demanded amendments to the Election Act to make mandatory the appointment of religious minority women to these seats.

The government continued to permit limited non-Muslim foreign missionary activity and to allow 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 could grant visas to foreign missionaries invited by organizations registered in the country. The visas were valid for one year and allowed one reentry into the country per year, although it was understood by missionary sources that only “replacement” visas for those taking the place of departing missionaries were available for long-term missionaries seeking to enter the country for the first time. The website further stated ‘ government could grant extensions for two years with two reentries per year, excluding applicants from India.

The government continued its warnings against blasphemy and other illegal content on social media through periodic print advertisements and text messages sent by the Pakistan Telecommunications Authority (PTA). The text messages stated, "Sharing of blasphemy, pornography, terrorism, and other unlawful content on social media and the internet is illegal." Users were advised to report such content to a government website for action under PECA 16 (the 2016 PECA act).

In June, the PTA reported that uploading of content related to blasphemy and hate speech continued on social networking sites. A report prepared by the FIA's cybercrime wing revealed that in 2020, the state blocked 111 accounts for containing blasphemous material, 47 for featuring hate speech, and nine for spreading sectarian hatred. From January through June 2021, the FIA cybercrime wing and the PTA removed 110 accounts, blocked 86 accounts for containing blasphemous content, 15 for hate speech, and nine for uploading sectarian material.

In November, the Islamabad High Court (IHC) reprimanded an FIA official for failing to identify and arrest individuals who allegedly uploaded blasphemous content on social media. The FIA informed the court it blocked some of those links, and the IHC directed it to strictly enforce regulations mandating the removal of blasphemous content.

In early January, the PTA asked social media platforms to take down the trailer of the movie, "Lady of Heaven" for sacrilegious content. In late January, the PTA told the IHC that it blocked 452 links that month to the trailer of a movie on the video-streaming platform Netflix on grounds that it contained sacrilegious material.

On January 22, the PTA blocked a U.S.-based website, "trueislam.com," administrated by members of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community-USA, from being viewed in Pakistan on charges that the website propagated blasphemous content.

On June 28, the Sindh High Court ordered the nationwide suspension of access to the video-sharing social media platform TikTok until July 8. The court issued the order in response to a petition filed by a citizen aggrieved by the "immorality and obscenity" spread by content on the platform. On July 20, the PTA again blocked access to TikTok "due to the continuous presence of inappropriate content on the platform and its failure to take such content down." Reactions to the PTA's measure were mixed, with many social media users praising the decision, but others expressing concerns that the government could similarly ban religious minorities. In November, the PTA lifted the ban on TikTok and released a statement saying it

“will continue to monitor the platform in order to ensure that unlawful content contrary to Pakistan’s law and societal values is not disseminated.”

In April, a lawmaker from the ruling Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party introduced a resolution in parliament calling for expulsion of the French Ambassador over the republication of caricatures depicting Islam in a French magazine in 2020, which PTI said were blasphemous. On April 21, the Sindh Provincial Assembly passed a unanimous resolution to condemn the publication of these sketches in France and demanded a federal movement against practices which “harm religious harmony throughout the world.” Lawmakers in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Provincial Assembly passed a resolution on September 17 requiring official documents to include the Khatan-un-Nabiyeen, or “finality of the Prophet” along with the Prophet Mohammed’s name.

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 announced that a collaboration between the Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETPB), provincial governments, and Sikh and Hindu community members would renovate several Hindu temples and Sikh gurdwaras during the year. As of September, the government’s Survey of Pakistan mapping agency had surveyed, geotagged, and digitized 93 percent of the properties to be renovated.

Media reported that in November, the Islamabad Capital Development Authority gave permission for construction to resume on a boundary wall at the site of the first Hindu temple to be built in the capital. In 2020, Islamist political parties opposed to the project filed a petition in the IHC to stop construction, and vandals destroyed part of the wall.

On February 5, a judicial commission led by police and justice sector reform specialist Dr. Shoaib Suddle submitted a report to the Supreme Court attesting that the ETPB failed to maintain most of the ancient and holy sites of the country’s Hindu minority community. According to the report, out of 365 Hindu temples, only 13 were being managed by the ETPB, leaving caretaking responsibilities of 65 temples with the Hindu community, with 287 left untended. In January (latest figures available), out of a total of 1,830 temples and gurdwaras across the country, only 31 were operating.

On June 11, the Supreme Court blocked plans to demolish the historic 716-square-yard Dharam Shala, a Hindu community center in Karachi, and ordered the Karachi commi: to take possession of its land to protect the center from demolition. The court issued the verdict after Hindu community representatives told the court that the ETPB had leased the

property to private individuals who started demolishing the Dharam Shala to construct a new building.

Although there continued to be no official restriction on the construction of Ahmadiyya places of worship, Ahmadiyya Muslim community leaders stated local authorities regularly denied requisite construction permits, and forbid Ahmadis from calling them mosques.

Authorities provided enhanced security for Shia Muslim, Christian, and Hindu places of worship at various times throughout the year, including around particular religious holidays or in response to specific threats. In July, a judicial commission on religious minorities established a special national police unit to protect religious minorities and their places of worship, a move welcomed by most religious minority communities. In mid-November, police in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province reported the government there had established a new special security unit to protect religious sites and religious minority communities throughout the province. Ahmadiyya community representatives, however, noted their religious sites and cemeteries continued to lack police protection nationwide. In April, Lahore police provided security to the Christian community for Easter celebrations. The provincial government increased the number of police personnel and security forces near churches. The district police also directed its response units and special forces teams to patrol throughout the city. In August and September, the state provided increased security throughout the country for the Shia community's Muharram processions. Police authorities said 19,000 police and paramilitary force personnel deployed in the twin cities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi to secure the processions. Ahead of Christmas, police deployed officers to protect churches nationwide. Police also deployed snipers and used closed-circuit television cameras and metal detectors to ensure the security of churches and Christmas markets. In Sindh, police provided enhanced security at churches and Hindu temples, especially in Karachi, on the eves of festivals such as Christmas and Diwali.

In July, the Lahore High Court Bar Association (LHCBA) demanded that the federal interior ministry prevent the Ahmadi community from sacrificing animals on Eid al-Adha. In a letter written to the Chief Secretary of the government of Punjab, the LHCBA urged police to enforce blasphemy laws against Ahmadi community members taking part in religious rites during the holiday. Anti-Ahmadi groups used extensive online social media campaigns urging other non-Muslims to deny Ahmadis' right to sacrifice animals during Eid al-Adha. The government reported no investigations or arrests.

The Ministry of Human Rights and the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training held consultations with minority faith representatives during the year to review textbooks for derogatory material.

On August 16, Prime Minister Khan launched a new nationwide Single National Curriculum (SNC) for grades 1-5 that standardized primary school instruction across the country's three types of educational institutions – private, public, and religious. Religious minority groups criticized the SNC's emphasis on Islamic teachings across educational subjects and argued it violated constitutional restrictions on "compulsory religious instruction" as well as the constitution's 18th amendment, which delegates most authority for education to provincial governments.

In July, a judicial commission for the protection of religious minorities led by Dr. Suddle expressed concern to the Supreme Court that Islamic religious content was included in compulsory education courses under the SNC, including in Urdu and English language courses, thereby compelling religious minority students to receive Islamic religious instruction. The commission recommended all Islamic content from the SNC be placed in Islamic studies textbooks, because that subject was compulsory only for Muslim students. Islamist groups opposed this suggestion.

While the law 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, 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 the protection of the rights of religious minorities. The NCHR was also mandated to conduct investigations of allegations of human rights abuses, but legal sources said the commission had little power to enforce its requests for information and recommendations.

Members of religious minority communities said there continued to be an inconsistent application of laws safeguarding minority rights and enforcement of protections of religious minorities at both the federal and provincial levels by the Ministry of Law and Justice, the Ministry of Interior, and the Ministry of Human Rights. 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.

As of year's end, the National Commission for Minorities continued to function without legislative authority and without power to resolve problems. In September, the commission requested the President approve a draft bill to empower it under a legal framework, and recommended the chairperson be a member of a religious minority group; the government took no action on the request by year's end. Religious freedom activists and civil society groups raised concerns regarding the limited powers of the commission and the decision to exclude Ahmadi Muslims from being represented on the commission when it was first formed. Ahmadi Muslim leaders said they had never been approached about participating in the commission and would not join a body that required them to identify as non-Muslims.

Minority religious leaders said members of their communities continued to experience discrimination in admission to colleges and universities. For example, Christians reported incidents of what they perceived as discrimination in which otherwise qualified Christian students were passed over for scholarships solely because they were Christian. In another instance, a university admitted an Ahmadi Muslim student in Multan as part of a quota set aside for religious minorities. The university later cancelled the student's admission without disclosing the reason. The Lahore High Court ordered the university to reverse its decision and uphold its original offer of admission to the Ahmadi student. 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.

In July, some students and religious groups protested the inclusion of a question related to the founder of the Ahmadiyya community in the test for doctorate admissions at the University of Sindh in Jamshoro. The protestors threatened to file a blasphemy case a

administrators of the university. After negotiations, the university agreed to remove Ahmadi-related content from the admissions test.

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. On September 20, Christians living in the Landi Kotal area of the Khyber tribal district held a press conference to protest government orders to demolish their houses located adjacent to the town. They said local authorities ordered them to vacate their homes to expand a nearby jail. The affected families reported their ancestors had lived in the area since 1914 and they had no other place to live. On August 24, as part of an infrastructure project to improve the city's stormwater drains, the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) demolished a small church along a major stream and forcibly evicted some church members who lived nearby. KMC and the Sindh government took the action in spite of activists protesting on-site a day earlier and organizing a nationwide online campaign against the demolition using the #SaveStJosephChurch hashtag.

Residents of some lower-class Muslim communities also complained of discrimination by upper-class Muslims. On September 9, gravediggers unearthed the remains of 13 members of the Mallah community originally buried in Sann, Sindh and dumped them outside the graveyard. They said that Syed Zafar Hyder Shah, an influential person from an upper caste family ordered them to remove the graves. The incident sparked criticism from civil society representatives who termed the act "a notorious caste-based prejudice" that did not allow lower-caste individuals to be buried in the graveyard of Muslims. Police filed an investigation into the case against Syed Zafar and those who assisted him but made no arrests by year's end.

Most minority religious groups said they continued to face discrimination in government hiring. The Punjab government, under pressure from a group of Sunni clerics, transferred two Ahmadi local government officials out of Chakwal District on September 3. Dr. Waseem, a health department official, and Ayesha Kanwal, a shelter home official, were given three days to transfer and find work in other districts. According to religious minority activists, provincial governments also often failed to meet quotas for hiring religious minorities into the civil service. On September 28, the Supreme Court expressed concern regarding the government's failure to implement a 5 percent job quota for religious minorities at both the provincial and federal levels. In September, media reported that more than 30,000 government jobs reserved for minorities were vacant across the country.

Minority rights activists said most government employment advertisements for janitorial staff continued to list being non-Muslim as a requirement. Minority rights activists criticized these advertisements as discriminatory and insulting. For example, the Lahore Waste Management Company continued to employ mainly street sweepers who were Christians, which HRCP criticized as the result of employment advertisements continuing to specify that religious minorities should apply. HRCP stated such advertisements infringed on human dignity and violated the constitutional guarantee of equality of all citizens.

In July, the Punjab Public Service Commission published an advertisement for 12 vacant positions in different departments. The advertisement stated, "According to clause (5) of the Punjab Waqf Properties Ordinance 1979, no person may be appointed an officer unless he is a Muslim." Religious minority groups said the advertisement was discriminatory because it singled out Muslims as the only persons eligible to be appointed to positions of leadership at the commission.

Representatives of religious minorities said a "glass ceiling" continued to prevent their promotion to senior government positions, but one NGO also stated that due to insufficient higher education opportunities compared to the majority religious community, few religious minorities met the qualifications to apply for these positions. 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. Ahmadiyya officers, however, rarely rose above the rank of colonel and were not assigned to senior positions.

On September 7, all daily Urdu-language newspapers again published reports and articles to mark the 1974 amendment to the constitution that declared Ahmadis as non-Muslim, and to pay homage to the politicians and clerics who helped enact the amendment.

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

On September 7, the Jamiat-Ulema-I-Islami-Fazl (JUI-F) party held a large *Khatm-e-Nabuwat* conference in Peshawar, with party leaders and national and provincial parliamentarian attendance. On October 14, Sufi Barelvi Mufti Muneeb ur Rehman hosted a larger conference in Peshawar that included political party leaders, national parliamentarians, and provincial lawmakers from multiple political parties. At the conference, JUI-F national leader Fazl ur

Rehman and other JUI-F members attacked Pakistan's national leaders for what they said was un-Islamic legislation on issues such as protecting Ahmadis and preventing forced conversion, and they vowed to resist international pressure to abolish blasphemy laws.

Human rights advocates and Ahmadiyya Muslim community members reported authorities took no action to prevent attacks on Ahmadi mosques or punish assailants who demolished, damaged, forcibly occupied, or set fire to Ahmadi mosques. In several instances, they said police participated in the attacks. Local authorities did not allow the repair or unsealing of Ahmadi mosques damaged or demolished by rioters in previous years.

On January 15, police in Nankana, Punjab Province constructed a boundary wall abutting the minarets of an Ahmadi mosque, damaging them in the process. Police then blocked access to part of the mosque, informing Ahmadi officials they were acting at the request of several local officials. On January 26, in Toba Tek Sing, Punjab, two police officers, including the local commanding officer and several local citizens, broke multiple gravestones in an Ahmadiyya cemetery. The group then moved to the mosque, where they ordered the Ahmadis present to remove the name of Allah from public display. When the Ahmadis refused, one of the local citizens forcibly removed the plaques featuring Allah's name. On April 11, in Muzaffargarh District, Punjab, police officers and local citizens toppled the minarets of an Ahmadiyya mosque and removed Islamic scriptures from Ahmadi tombstones. The same police officers arrested five Ahmadis at the mosque on blasphemy charges. They were later released, but their cases remained pending at year's end. Also in April, the Ahmadiyya community noted that unknown assailants removed sacred religious words posted on the outside of nine Ahmadi homes in a district in Punjab. On July 31, the Ahmadiyya community reported local police desecrated and demolished the minarets of an Ahmadi place of worship in a rural settlement near Faisalabad, Punjab. It was the third such incident in the district; Ahmadi places of worship were also vandalized on June 17 and 24. The Ahmadiyya Muslim community also reported the desecration of 15 Ahmadiyya places of worship and 100 graves during the year in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province.

In April, the Ahmadiyya community and witnesses at the scene reported a group of individuals aided by police destroyed the minarets and dome of an Ahmadi mosque located in Muzaffargarh District, Punjab because by law, members of the Ahmadiyya community may not call their houses of worship mosques or have identifying features of mosques on their houses of worship. Police did not arrest members of the crowd for damaging the build' but instead arrested two Ahmadi men who were worshipers at the mosque. The polic

not register cases against the two men and released them shortly after. There was no further information available on this case at year's end.

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. Hindu Dalits remained vulnerable to human rights violations and pressure by perpetrators to withdraw police cases.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

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

In an incident that drew significant international outcry, a mob of several hundred Muslim workers from a sportswear factory in Sialkot, Punjab attacked Priantha Kumara, a Sri Lankan and Christian manager of the factory on December 3. Media reported that the mob beat, stoned, and kicked him to death, then dragged his corpse to the street and set it on fire. In widely seen videos on social media, Kumara was seen pleading for his life before he was killed. Witnesses reported that while the mob's actions were fueled by accusations of blasphemy, the incident began because of personal animosity between some factory employees and Kumara. The aggrieved factory workers allegedly incited the mob by accusing him of desecrating posters that contained written Islamic prayers. Police were called during the incident, but the small number who responded were far outnumbered by the crowd and media reported that police did not intervene. Punjab Inspector General of Police Rao Sardar Ali Khan told reporters a case would be submitted to an anti-terrorism court as soon as possible to bring the killers to justice. Prime Minister Khan said the attack was "horrific" and ordered a high-level inquiry. Media reported that police arrested more than 100 individuals after the attack. There were no further developments on this case before year's end.

On February 11, a teenager shot and killed an Ahmadi homeopathic doctor, Abdul Qadir, in his clinic in Peshawar. Ahmadiyya community members stated Qadir was killed because of his faith. According to media reports, local residents overpowered the assailant at the scene and handed him over to the police, who opened an investigation. At year's end, he remained in detention and his trial was underway in a court in Peshawar.

On September 2, four unidentified assailants shot and killed a British-Pakistani man retired from the Pakistani army, Maqsood Ahmad, who was an Ahmadiyya community member in Nankana Sahib, Punjab. Family members said he was shot as he was irrigating his farmland in Dharowal. The police launched a murder investigation, but as of year's end, the victim's killers had not been found.

On September 30, unknown attackers gunned down a Sikh man, Satnam Singh, in Peshawar. The police said the attackers escaped from the scene but lodged a case against the "unknown assailants." ISIS-K claimed responsibility for the attack.

On March 25, six Sunni Muslims died and seven were injured when assailants opened fire on a passenger vehicle traveling from Gilgit to Naltar. The vehicle was traveling through a Shia-majority area. Police said the attack on the passenger van was retaliation for an earlier incident when Shia youth passing through Naltar Bala were ambushed and killed 18 months prior.

On August 19, three persons died, and 59 others were injured in a grenade attack on a Shia procession in Bahawalnagar, Punjab. It was the third sectarian strike in the area to occur in two months, including an attack on August 6 against a Shia worship site.

On March 24, media reported an unknown man attacked and killed Taqi Shah, a religious scholar from the Shia community in Jhang, Punjab over blasphemy allegations. The scholar had faced similar blasphemy charges in 2019. In March, police arrested a suspect, who subsequently confessed to killing Shah. There was no further information available on this case at year's end.

On January 3, ISIS-K militants claimed responsibility for killing 11 coal miners belonging to the Hazara Shia community in Mach, Balochistan. Members of the Hazara Shia community in Quetta staged a protest against the government's failure to protect the community in Balochistan. Human rights organizations criticized the Prime Minister for saying the Hazara protestors were "blackmailing" him by demanding he visit them in Balochistan to ensure justice for the victims. On January 6, Prime Minister Khan released a statement on social media against sectarian violence, stating the government was "taking steps to prevent such attacks in the future," and traveled to Machh on January 9 to meet with families who lost loved ones in the attack.

The Hindu community in Sindh and Balochistan remained vulnerable to targeted killings and kidnappings for ransom. On May 31, unidentified assailants killed Ashok Kumar, a Hindu

trader in Khuzdar, Balochistan after he reportedly refused to pay extortion money to criminals. This was the second Hindu trader since July 2020 to have been killed in Wadh for the same reason. Following the killing of Ashok Kumar, Baloch social media users urged the government to take steps to ensure security of religious minorities in Balochistan. In June, unidentified individuals distributed intimidating pamphlets outside of shops owned by Hindu traders in Khuzdar telling them not to allow female customers into their shops, or face consequences.

On February 25, unknown assailants killed Mahesh Kumar, a Hindu youth, and set his corpse on fire in Jacobabad, Sindh. The Hindu community protested and demanded police arrest the suspects. They reported police were slow to respond to the killing, while media failed to give appropriate coverage to the incident.

Civil society organizations and media said that armed sectarian groups connected to organizations banned by the government, including the TTP, 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 five sectarian attacks by armed groups during 2021, compared with 10 sectarian attacks reported in 2020. 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 with a suspected sectarian motive, media often refrained from reporting the victim's sectarian identity in an effort to avoid stoking tension among sectarian groups.

Sunni Muslim citizens levied multiple charges of blasphemy against members of the Shia community throughout the year. On August 19, police fired teargas shells and live rounds into the air in Hyderabad, Sindh to disperse a mob protesting because they believed a Shia man had committed blasphemy. The community pressured police to file a blasphemy case against the man. In another instance, on May 6, a group of Sunni religious leaders filed a blasphemy case against Shia scholar Allama Amjad Jauhari in Karachi for remarks they said insulted the companions of the Prophet Mohammed. The complainants said that Jauhari used derogatory language during one of his sermons at a Shia gathering; they requested police take action against him. The next day police opened an investigation into Jauhari's alleged blasphemy. The investigation was ongoing at year's end.

In its *2022 World Watch List* report, which covered events in 2021, the international NGO Open Doors said that “Christians are considered second-class citizens and are discriminated against in every aspect of life” in the country. The report highlighted allegations that COVID-19 assistance was leveraged to try and get Christians to convert to Islam, that blasphemy laws continued to be used to target Christians with false allegations, and that Christian women and girls were targeted for kidnapping, forced marriage, and conversion to Islam.

Civil society activists and media reported young Christian and Hindu women being abducted and raped by Muslim men. Victims said their attackers singled them out as vulnerable due to their religious minority identity. 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.

Christian activists stated young women from their communities were also vulnerable to forced conversions. According to online Christian media sources, in June, a 30-year-old man was accused of kidnapping, forcibly converting to Islam, and forcibly marrying a Christian girl in Gujranwala District, Punjab. The media reports stated that while the girl’s parents told police and the courts that she was 13 years old, the girl herself told the court that she was 19. According to the police, two of the suspects were taken into custody, but the girl later appeared before a local court where she said that she left her house, converted to Islam, and married her husband willingly. Consequently, the court allowed the girl to go with her husband and ordered the police to drop the case. The girl’s father protested, stating his daughter was a minor, and that the court should not have accepted her statement declaring she willingly converted and married. On July 1, the Lahore High Court upheld the lower court’s ruling, allowing the girl to remain with her husband.

In September, media reported that a Muslim man kidnapped, raped, and attempted to kill an eight-year-old Christian girl by hitting her with a stone, and leaving her unconscious on the ground. Police later arrested the accused under anti-rape and domestic violence laws. There was no additional information available on this case at year’s end.

Members of civil society reported that converts from Islam lived in varying degrees of secrecy for fear of violent retribution from family members or society at large.

Representatives of the Kalash, an indigenous group in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, continued to report their youth were under pressure from Muslim schoolteachers and 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-Ahmadiyya rhetoric which Ahmadiyya community representatives said could incite violence against Ahmadis. In addition to the large JUI-F conference and rallies, the Islamist party Jamaat-e-Islami held a large event in September in Peshawar; both parties criticized the national government for failing to enforce Islamic law. The TLP, banned under the National Counterterrorism Authority's Schedule-I list until it was removed in November, also held smaller rallies.

On September 8, Aalmi Majlis Tahaffuz Khatm Nabuwwat, a Muslim missionary organization, organized a conference at Minar-e-Pakistan, Lahore where speakers urged the government to "check un-Islamic and unconstitutional" activities of Ahmadis, ban them from proselytizing, and remove them from key official posts.

On October 8, JUI-F held Khatm-e-Nabuwat conferences in Multan where speakers, including JUI-F party chief Moulana Fazl ur Rehman, vowed to stop Ahmadis' entry into high government posts.

Members of religious minority communities continued to report cruel, inhumane, or degrading treatment, and illegal confinement due to their faith. In September, media reported a group of Muslim landlords physically abused and held hostage a family from a Hindu community in Rahim Yar Khan, Punjab for obtaining water from a mosque tap and therefore "violating the sanctity" of the place of worship. According to media reports, Alam Ram Bheel, a farm worker, and his family were fetching drinking water after work when a group of local landlords and accomplices beat them and held them until Muslim neighbors negotiated their release.

On July 26, a video went viral showing a Muslim man forcing a Hindu laborer to mock Hindu deities in Mithi, Sindh. In the video, the individual was seen swearing at the Hindu man and forcing him to say "Allahu Akbar." Police arrested the Muslim man and registered a blasphemy case against him on behalf of the state. The Hindu man and his family pardoned the Muslim man, and the case was dropped. The Muslim man publicly apologized for his act. Religious minority activists criticized this case, stating that persons charged with blasphemy were rarely pardoned.

In September, several religious groups from the Deobandi and Bareilvi schools of Sunnī organized a series of rallies in Karachi to denounce Shia "defamation" of revered Sunni religious figures.

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 media reports of attacks on religious minorities' holy places, cemeteries, and religious symbols. On August 17, police in Lahore arrested a member of the TLP for vandalizing a statue of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, the Sikh warrior who ruled over Punjab in the 19th century; the statue had been vandalized numerous times since its unveiling in 2019. In a video of the incident posted on social media, the TLP member shouted party slogans while pulling the statue apart, and onlookers immediately detained him. Both the Lahore police and Punjab Chief Minister Usman Buzdar called for the individual to be prosecuted. Following the TLP member's arrest, a magisterial court in Lahore granted him bail, and his case was pending at year's end.

During a January 5 Supreme Court hearing, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa officials reported the suspension of more than 90 police officers from duty and more than 109 arrests related to a December 2020 incident in which a group of villagers destroyed a historic Hindu temple. The court directed a local cleric responsible for inciting the protestors and those who assisted him to contribute money to assist in the temple's restoration. The temple was rebuilt and on November 8, Supreme Court Chief Justice Gulzar Ahmed inaugurated it during the Hindu community's Diwali celebration.

On July 24, a Muslim cleric in the village of Bhong, Punjab, filed blasphemy charges against an eight-year-old Hindu boy, claiming the boy had involuntarily urinated in a local mosque. In response, on August 4, hundreds of protestors vandalized a local Hindu temple, partially burning the building, destroying Hindu idols, and blocking a nearby highway for three hours. On August 7, Chief Justice Ahmed directed the Punjab police to arrest all involved in vandalizing and looting the temple. Police arrested 95 individuals, later freeing 10 while holding 85 in custody to face trial in anti-terrorism courts. The 85 were in custody at year's end.

In May, a group of 200 Muslims attacked a Catholic church and 15 houses belonging to Christians in the village of Chak 5 in Punjab Province after a Muslim man accused boys cleaning the church of throwing dust on him. At least eight Christian community members suffered serious injury.

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.

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.

On September 7, all daily Urdu newspapers again published reports and articles to mark the 1974 amendment to the constitution which declared Ahmadis as non-Muslims. 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 Charge d’Affaires, consuls general, other embassy officers, and visiting congressional delegations and senior U.S. officials, including the Deputy Secretary 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, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, and Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony to discuss blasphemy law reform, laws concerning Ahmadi Muslims, the need to better protect members of religious minority communities, sectarian relations, and religious respect.

Embassy officers met with civil society leaders, experts, and journalists to collect information on religious freedom abuses not covered in the media, stress the need to protect the rights of religious minorities, and continue to support measures that decrease sectarian violence. They also met with representatives of other embassies, leaders of religious communities, NGOs, and legal experts working on religious freedom issues to discuss ways to increase

respect among religious groups and enhance dialogue. The embassy and consulates highlighted the principles of religious freedom and examples of interfaith dialogue in the United States on their social media platforms throughout the year. On July 5, the American Muslim and Multifaith Women's Empowerment Council, in collaboration with local interfaith leaders, convened U.S. and Pakistani faith leaders from the Hindu, Sikh, Parsi, Baha'i, Christian, and transgender communities in Karachi. In his opening remarks, the Consul General in Karachi expressed the U.S. commitment to support religious minority rights as a bulwark against intolerance and emphasized that religious freedom is integral to a vibrant democratic society.

The embassy and consulate 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 October 28, the consulate general in Lahore arranged a webinar featuring a prominent scholar from the International Islamic University in Islamabad to promote tolerance and religious harmony. The consulate general also collaborated with Michigan State University to fund an exchange program for female Ulema religious scholars to deepen understanding and appreciation of diverse interfaith traditions.

An embassy-supported activity aimed at community resilience continued to implement small grants programs to engage diverse stakeholders including community and religious leaders, government officials, university administrators, youth, and women to identify and remove hateful materials and promote peace, tolerance, and acceptance among diverse communities in Karachi, northern Sindh, and southern Punjab. The embassy supported multiple activities engaging provincial ministers from Punjab and legislators from Punjab and Sindh Provinces to promote tolerance and diversity and mitigate religious intolerance. An embassy-supported project focused on increasing the individual capacity of religious leaders, elders, and youth from different religious backgrounds to promote interfaith peace and cohesion in their communities. These efforts aimed to address religious divisions by enhancing mutual understanding, integration, and collaboration among communities representing different religious schools and religious groups.

On November 15, the Secretary of State redesignated Pakistan as a CPC under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, as amended, for having engaged in or tolerated severe violations of religious freedom and issued a waiver of the sanctions that accompany the designation in the national interests of the United States.

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