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2009 Report on International Religious Freedom - Pakistan

[Covers the period from July 1, 2008, to June 30, 2009]

The country is an Islamic republic. Islam is the state religion, and the Constitution requires that laws be consistent with Islam. The Constitution states that "subject to law, public order, and morality, every citizen shall have the right to profess, practice, and propagate his religion;" in practice the Government imposes limits on freedom of religion. Freedom of speech is constitutionally, "subject to any reasonable restrictions imposed by law in the interest of the glory of Islam."

The Government took some steps to improve its treatment of religious minorities during the reporting period. The democratically elected Government appointed a Roman Catholic as Federal Minister for Minorities Affairs and upgraded his position to a cabinet minister. The Government allocated a 5 percent quota for religious minorities in all federal jobs, and directed provincial governments to implement the same at the provincial level. The Government also decided to celebrate Minorities' Day on August 11 every year nationwide. Despite these steps, serious problems remained. Law enforcement personnel abused religious minorities in custody. Security forces and other government agencies did not adequately prevent or address societal abuse against minorities. Discriminatory legislation and the Government's failure to take action against societal forces hostile to those who practice a different religious belief fostered religious intolerance, acts of violence, and intimidation against religious minorities. Specific laws that discriminate against religious minorities include anti-Ahmadi and blasphemy laws that provide the death penalty for defiling Islam or its prophets. The Ahmadiyya community continued to face governmental and societal discrimination and legal bars to the practice of its religious beliefs. Members of other Islamic sects also claimed governmental discrimination.

Relations between religious communities were tense. Societal discrimination against religious minorities was widespread, and societal violence against such groups occurred. Non-governmental actors, including terrorist and extremist groups and individuals, targeted religious congregations. A domestic insurgency led by Sunni Taliban elements increased acts of violence and intimidation against religious minorities and exacerbated existing sectarian tensions. An extremist insurgency increased its efforts to impose its extremist religious views on the majority. Extremists demanded that Muslims with progressive views, particularly women, follow a strict version of Islam and threatened dire consequences if they did not abide by it.

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

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 310,527 square miles and a population of 173 million. Official figures on religious demography, based on the 1998 census, showed that approximately 97 percent of the population was Muslim. Groups comprising 2 percent of the population or less include Hindus, Christians, and others, including Ahmadis. The majority of Muslims in the country are Sunni, with a Shi'a minority of approximately 20 percent. According to the Ministry of Minorities Affairs, Sikhs have approximately 30,000 adherents and Buddhists 20,000. The number of Parsis (Zoroastrians), according to a Parsi community center in Karachi, dropped to 1,822 in 2009 as compared to 2,039 in June 2006. The Baha'i claimed that the number of Baha'is is growing in Pakistan, with approximately 30,000 adherents. The number of Ahmadis living in Pakistan, according to Jamaat-e-Ahmadiyya, is nearly 600,000, although it is difficult

to establish an accurate estimate because Ahmadis, who are legally prohibited from identifying themselves as Muslims, generally choose to not identify themselves as non-Muslims. Some tribes in Balochistan and the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) practiced traditional animist religious beliefs; other religious groups include Kalasha, Kihals, and Jains.

Less than 0.5 percent of the population, as recorded in the 1998 census, was silent on religious affiliation or claimed not to adhere to a particular religious group. Social pressure was such that few persons would claim no religious affiliation.

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

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

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

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

Freedom of speech is subject to "reasonable" restrictions in the interest of the "glory of Islam." The consequences for contravening the country's blasphemy laws are death for defiling Islam or its prophets; life imprisonment for defiling, damaging, or desecrating the Qur'an; and 10 years' imprisonment for insulting another's religious feelings. Some individuals bring charges under these laws to settle personal scores or to intimidate vulnerable Muslims, sectarian opponents, and religious minorities. Under the Anti-Terrorism Act, any action, including speech, intended to incite religious hatred is punishable by up to seven years' imprisonment. Under the act, bail is not to be granted if the judge has reasonable grounds to believe the accused is guilty; however, the bail provision of the law is selectively applied.

Any speech or conduct that injures another's religious feelings, including those of minority religious groups, is prohibited and punishable by imprisonment. In cases in which a minority group claimed its religious feelings were insulted, however, the blasphemy laws were rarely enforced, and cases were rarely brought to the legal system. A 2005 law requires that a senior police official investigate any blasphemy charge before a complaint is filed. According to nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), this law was not uniformly enforced.

The Penal Code incorporates a number of Islamic law (Shari'a) provisions. The judicial system encompasses several different court systems with overlapping and sometimes competing jurisdictions that reflect differences in civil, criminal, and Islamic jurisprudence. The Federal Shari'a Court and the Shari'a bench of the Supreme Court serve as appellate courts for certain convictions in criminal court under the Hudood Ordinance, which criminalizes rape, extramarital sex, property crimes, alcohol, and gambling; judges and attorneys in these courts must be Muslim. The Federal Shari'a Court may overturn any legislation judged inconsistent with the tenets of Islam. In March 2005, however, the Supreme Court Chief Justice ruled that the Federal Shari'a Court had no jurisdiction to review a decision by a provincial high court even if the Federal Shari'a Court should have had initial appellate jurisdiction.

Criminal law allows offenders to offer monetary restitution to victims and allows victims to carry out physical retribution rather than seeking punishment through the court system. The "Qisaas and Diyat" law calls for either providing retribution for murder and other violent crimes (Qisaas) or compensation money to the victim of the crime (Diyat). Religious minorities claimed that the amounts of monetary restitution were far higher for minority offenders and far lower for minority victims than for Muslims.

The 2006 Women's Protection Bill amended the Hudood Ordinance and moved cases of rape and adultery to secular rather than Shari'a courts. Previously, the Hudood Ordinance often relied on harsh and discriminatory interpretations of Qur'anic standards of evidence and punishment that applied equally to Muslims and non-Muslims. If Qur'anic standards are used, Muslim and non-Muslim and male and female testimony carry different weight. Approximately 2,500 women

have been released from prison since former President Musharraf ordered the release of all women imprisoned under the Hudood Ordinance. Many were unable to return to their homes because of social ostracism. A few others remained in custody, and most were housed in government-run shelters. The women, who were originally arrested under the Hudood Ordinance on charges of fornication, adultery, and possession of liquor, are now having their cases heard under the Women's Protection Bill. According to the Society for Human Rights and Prisoners Aid, the number of adultery-related cases against women considerably dropped during 2008-09.

The Government designates religious affiliation on passports and requests religious information in national identity card applications. A citizen must have a national identity card to vote. Those wishing to be listed as Muslims must swear their belief that the Prophet Muhammad is the final prophet and denounce the Ahmadiyya movement's founder as a false prophet and his followers as non-Muslims, a provision designed to discriminate against Ahmadis. As a result, Ahmadis continued to boycott elections.

The Constitution provides for "freedom to manage religious institutions." In principle, the Government does not restrict organized religious groups from establishing places of worship and training members of the clergy. In practice, however, religious minorities suffered from restrictions of this right. District-level authorities consistently refused to grant permission to construct non-Muslim places of worship, especially for Ahmadiyya and Baha'i communities, citing the need to maintain public order. There is no official restriction on the construction of Ahmadiyya places of worship; however, Ahmadis are forbidden from calling them mosques. District governments often refuse to grant Ahmadis permission to hold events publicly; therefore, they hold their meetings in members' homes. The Government can shut down these gatherings if neighbors report hearing the recitation of Qur'anic verses.

The Government provides funding for construction and maintenance of mosques and for Islamic clergy. The provincial and federal governments have legal responsibility for certain religious properties belonging to minority communities that were abandoned during the partition of Pakistan and India in 1947. Minority communities claimed the Government did not spend adequate funds on the protection and upkeep of those properties. The Government collected a 2.5 percent tax (zakat) on all Sunni Muslims and distributed the funds to Sunni mosques, madrassahs, and charities. No similar requirement was imposed on other religious groups.

Government policies do not afford equal protection to members of majority and minority religious groups. The Ministry of Religious Affairs, Zakat, and Ushr, which is primarily responsible for organizing participation in the Hajj and other Islamic religious pilgrimages, in addition to safeguarding religious freedom, claims it spends 30 percent of its annual budget to assist indigent minorities, repair minority places of worship, establish minority-run small development projects, and celebrate minority festivals. Religious minorities questioned these figures, observing that localities and villages that are home to minority citizens go without basic civic amenities. The Ministry has on its masthead a Qur'anic verse: "Islam is the only religion acceptable to God."

The Ministry of Minorities Affairs, a stand-alone ministry since 2004, has the "aim to protect the rights of minorities as envisaged under the 1973 Constitution of Pakistan." In November 2008 Shahbaz Bhatti, a Roman Catholic, was appointed Federal Minister for Minorities' Affairs in a move the Christian community and other religious groups throughout Pakistan welcomed. This was the first time the position had received the stature of a cabinet minister; in the past, the portfolio for minorities was entrusted to a lower-ranking official working under another federal minister.

The Government observes Islamic holy days as national holidays.

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

Islamiyyat (Islamic studies) is compulsory for all Muslim students in state-run schools. Although students of other religious groups are not legally required to study Islam, they are not offered parallel studies in their own religious beliefs. In some schools non-Muslim students may study Akhlaqiyyat, or Ethics.

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

Parents may send children to religious schools, at the family's expense. Private schools are free to teach or not to teach religious studies as they choose.

Islamic schools, or madrassahs, are traditional institutions for Muslims seeking a purely religious education. In many rural communities, madrassahs are the only form of education available. In recent years some madrassahs have taught extremist doctrine in support of terrorism. In an attempt to curb the spread of extremism, the 2002 Madrassah Registration Ordinance requires all madrassahs to register with one of the five independent boards (wafaqs), cease accepting foreign financing, and accept foreign students only with the consent of their government. Approximately 15,725 madrassahs had registered by the end of the reporting period; however, many civil society organizations and education experts disputed the statistics on the number of registered and unregistered madrassahs.

A 2005 framework for cooperative registration of madrassahs, including provision of financial and educational data and a prohibition on the teaching of sectarian or religious hatred and violence, remained stalled due to political upheaval and jurisdictional battles within the previous government. The Government and the independent madrassah boards had agreed to a phased introduction to all madrassahs of secular subjects, including mathematics, English, and science. The civilian government that took office in 2008 listed madrassah reform as a priority.

The Government announced, but has not approved, a uniform curriculum for madrassahs, with a more secular tone. The Chief Secretary of the Federal Madrassah Board (Wafaq-ul-Madaris), Maulana Mohammad Hanif Jalandhri, opposed this policy in April 2009, stating that no interference by the Government would be tolerated and no revision of madrassah curriculum would be accepted without consultation and approval of the Board.

All wafaqs continued to mandate the elimination of teaching that promoted religious or sectarian intolerance, and terrorist or extremist recruitment at madrassahs. Inspectors mandated that affiliated madrassahs supplement religious studies with secular subjects. Wafaqs also restricted foreign private funding of madrassahs. Examination concerns remained under active discussion with the Government. Some unregistered and Deobandi-controlled madrassahs in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), Karachi, and northern Balochistan continued to teach extremism. Similarly, the Dawa schools, run by Jamaat-ud-Dawa, a charitable front for the banned Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, continued such teaching and recruitment for Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, a designated foreign terrorist organization. Following the November 2008 terrorist attacks in Mumbai, India, attributed to Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, the government of the province of Punjab took over management of several Jamaat-ud-Dawa institutions.

In an effort to end Taliban violence in the Swat valley, the NWFP government, led by the Awami National Party (ANP), concluded a peace deal in February 2009 with extremist organization Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi (TNSM) that included a commitment to implement the Nizam-e-Adl Regulation (NAR) in the Malakand division of the NWFP. In April 2009 President Asif Ali Zardari signed the NAR, making it effective. Based on previous attempts in 1994 and 1998 to establish Shari'a (interpreted locally as "swift justice"), the NAR establishes limits for deciding civil and criminal cases, re-creates qazi (religious judges) chosen by the state, and establishes a local appeals court whose judges are selected by the Peshawar High Court. Civil society in general and the minority religious community in particular expressed concern about the effects of creating an alternative religious-based system of justice in Swat. NAR defenders pointed out that, under the Constitution, all laws must already conform to Islam. In this respect the NAR is not a new regulation.

The deal was signed with the expectation that local militants would disarm in return for the implementation of Shari'a through the NAR. After the President signed the NAR, however, the militants refused to disarm, and extended their patrols to Buner District of the Malakand Division. Amid growing incidents of violence by the militants, the army launched a military operation on April 26, 2009, resulting in the largest mass migration in the country's history since partition and clearing much of the territory claimed by the Taliban.

At the end of the reporting period, the army was completing operations in Malakand, and the area was back in the control of the NWFP government, but the NAR had not yet been implemented.

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

The Government, at its most senior levels, continued to call for interfaith dialogue and sectarian harmony to promote moderation, tolerance, and minority rights.

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

There are no legal requirements for an individual to practice or affiliate nominally with a religious group; however, the Constitution requires that the President and Prime Minister be Muslims. All senior officials, including members of Parliament, must swear an oath to protect the country's Islamic identity. Government employees are not prohibited from displaying or practicing any elements of their religious beliefs.

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

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

The Government does not recognize either civil or common law marriage. Marriages are performed and registered according to one's religious group. The marriages of non-Muslim men remain legal upon conversion to Islam. If a non-Muslim female converts to Islam, and her marriage was performed according to her previous religious beliefs, the marriage is considered dissolved. Children born to Hindu or Christian women who convert to Islam after marriage are considered illegitimate unless their husbands also convert. The only way the marriage can be legitimated and the children made eligible for inheritance is for the husband to convert to Islam. The children of a Muslim man and a Muslim woman who both convert to another religious group are considered illegitimate, and the Government can take custody of the children.

The Government did not restrict the formation of political parties based on a particular religious group, religious belief, or interpretation of religious doctrine. The Government monitored the activities of various Islamist parties and affiliated clergy due to prior links to terrorist and extremist organizations. There are reserved seats for religious minority members in both the national and provincial assemblies. The seats are allocated to the political parties on a proportional basis determined by their overall representation in the assembly. The National Assembly has 10 members of minority religious groups, and minorities are represented in most tiers of local government, including union councils, tehsil councils, and district councils. Minorities were also elected to the provincial assemblies: three non-Muslims in the NWFP, eight in Punjab, nine in Sindh, and three in Balochistan.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally enforced existing legal restrictions on religious freedom.

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

The Constitution guarantees the right to establish places of worship and train clergy, but in practice these rights were restricted for Ahmadis. According to media reports, authorities continued to conduct surveillance on Ahmadis and their institutions. Several Ahmadiyya mosques reportedly were closed; others reportedly were desecrated or their construction was stopped.

Public pressure routinely prevented courts from protecting minority rights and forced judges to take strong action against any perceived offense to Sunni orthodoxy. Discrimination charges against religious minorities were rarely brought before the judiciary. According to several NGOs, cases against Christians and Ahmadis continued to increase during the reporting period; however, the judiciary, even at the lower levels, acted more judiciously in dealing with these cases as compared with previous reporting periods. NGOs reported that cases against both the local Christian and Hindu communities continued but to a lesser degree and that social discrimination remained at high levels. There was generally a long period between filing a case and the first court appearance. Lower courts were frequently subject to intimidation, delayed issuing decisions, and refused bail for fear of reprisal from extremist elements. Original trial courts usually denied bail in blasphemy cases, arguing that defendants facing the death penalty were likely to flee. As with the majority of cases in the country, many defendants appealed the denial of bail, but bail was often not granted in advance of the trial.

In contrast to previous reporting periods, there were no reports of district governments restricting the distribution and display of certain religious images, such as the Holy Trinity and Jesus Christ. Such images were openly displayed and sold in Christian communities.

Religious belief or specific adherence to a religious group was not required for membership in the ruling party or the moderate opposition parties. All political parties, except religious parties, had a separate minority wing.

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

The Government sometimes funded and facilitated Hajj travel but had no similar program for pilgrimages by religious minorities. Due to the passport requirements to list religious affiliation and denounce the Ahmadi prophet, Ahmadis were restricted from going on the Hajj because they were unable to declare themselves as Muslims. Due to the fact that the Government does not recognize Israel, religious believers regardless of religious affiliation were unable to travel to Israel on pilgrimage. This especially affected Baha'is, since the Baha'i World Centre, the spiritual and administrative heart of the community, is located in northern Israel.

Although discrimination continued to exist, particularly against Hindus, during the reporting period, there were no reports of discrimination against Ahmadis and Christians when they applied for entry to universities and medical schools. During this period, Shi'a leaders said they were not subjected to discrimination in hiring for the civil service or admission to government institutions of higher learning.

Promotions for all minority groups appeared limited within the civil service. These problems were particularly acute for Ahmadis, who contended that a "glass ceiling" prevented their promotion to senior positions and that certain government departments refused to hire or retain qualified Ahmadis. The Government discriminated against some groups, such as Ahl-e-Hadith and Bareilvi, in hiring clergy for government mosques and faculty members for Islamic government colleges.

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

The public school curriculum included derogatory remarks in textbooks against minority religious groups, particularly Ahmadis, Hindus, and Jews, and the teaching of religious intolerance was widespread. The Government continued to revise curriculum to eliminate such teachings and remove Islamic overtones from secular subjects.

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

Abuses of Religious Freedom

Police reportedly tortured and mistreated those in custody and at times engaged in extrajudicial killings. It was usually impossible to ascertain whether adherence to particular religious beliefs was a factor in cases in which religious minorities were victims; however, both Christian and Ahmadiyya communities claimed their members were more likely to be abused. Non-Muslim prisoners generally were accorded poorer facilities than Muslim inmates, including lack of access to spiritual resources. Conversion to other minority religious groups generally took place in secret to avoid societal backlash.

Ahmadiyya leaders claimed the Government used sections of the Penal Code against their members for religious reasons. Authorities often accused converts to the Ahmadiyya community of blasphemy, violations of anti-Ahmadi laws, or other crimes. The Government used anti-Ahmadi laws to target and harass Ahmadis. The vague wording of the provision that forbids Ahmadis from directly or indirectly identifying themselves as Muslims enabled officials to bring charges against Ahmadis for using the standard Muslim greeting and for naming their children Muhammad. According to the Rabwah-based Jamaat-e-Ahmadiya, as of April 2009, 88 Ahmadis faced criminal charges under religious laws or because of their religious beliefs: 18 under blasphemy laws, 68 under Ahmadi-specific laws, and two under other clauses.

According to data provided by Ahmadiyya leaders, at the end of the reporting period, 12 Ahmadis were in prison, of whom one was facing life imprisonment, three were facing death sentences, five had been arrested under blasphemy charges, and three others were awaiting trial. Most of the arrests took place in Rabwah, Kotli, Nankana Sahib, Kotri, and Sargodha. The Ahmadiyya community claimed the arrests were groundless and based on the detainees' religious beliefs. Several criminal cases, ranging from killings to destruction of property, were filed against prominent members of the Ahmadiyya community during the reporting period. The cases remained unprosecuted, and the accused were allowed to post bail.

On June 30, 2009, a fistfight erupted into an alleged incident of blasphemy that sparked a mob attack on a Christian community in the district of Kasur, Punjab, prompting 700 persons to flee their homes. Federal Minister for Minorities Affairs Shahbaz Bhatti offered compensation to the affected families. Several NGOs remained concerned about the incident.

On June 23, 2009, Compass Direct News reported that police imprisoned Arshad Masih, a Christian man from Gujranwala, in Sialkot jail and abused him in custody. Reportedly, police abused Masih because his father was a Christian preacher. Although he was officially charged with robbery, he was later granted bail on the strength of testimony that he was not among the robbers. Due to the physical abuse he suffered in custody, he was sent to the Allama Iqbal Memorial Hospital. According to Compass Direct News, authorities allegedly ordered him to be silent about the abuse.

On May 28, 2009, Mian Laiq Ahmad, an Ahmadi trader in Faisalabad, died after unknown assailants brutally attacked him. According to Jamaat-e-Ahmadiyya, he was the fifth Ahmadi killed in 2009 and the 101st killed since anti-Ahmadi laws were introduced in 1984.

In May 2009 two students of a seminary in Chakwal, Punjab, entered the home of an Ahmadi, Mubashir Ahmed, and tried to behead him. Neighbors intervened and saved his life, but he was severely injured. One student was caught and brought to a local police station and the other escaped. Police booked a case and were trying to find the other assailant.

On April 17, 2009, authorities released from prison Catholics James Masih and Buta Masih, who were convicted of blasphemy and sentenced to 10 years in prison in November 2006 for allegedly burning a Qur'an.

On March 4, 2009, 15 Ahmadis were charged under Section 298c of the Penal Code for calling their place of worship a mosque and for offering Eid prayers there. They were also charged with posing as Muslims. According to reports, the arrests were the result of a business dispute.

A 17-year-old student, Naveed Aziz, and Pastor Shafiq Masih were accused of blasphemy in January 2009 when a fellow student noticed "blasphemous material" in Aziz's bag.

In January 2009 police arrested four Ahmadi teenagers and an adult in Layyah, Punjab, on charges of blasphemy. Because there was no supporting evidence, the accused were not indicted; however, they remain incarcerated more than five months after their arrest. Some local clerics reportedly attempted to incite communal tensions following the incident. Allegedly, a local Member of the National Assembly from the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz party, *Saqlain Shah*, provided political support for the agitation. At the federal level, the Ministry of Minorities Affairs tried to win the release of the teenagers but had not succeeded by the end of the reporting period.

In January 2009 police arrested Hector Aleem in Rawalpindi on charges of sending a blasphemous text message from his cell phone. After a hearing by an antiterrorism court, Aleem, who is a member of an agency that works for Christians' rights, was cleared of the blasphemy charges but not of abetting a crime. A government official told Compass Direct News the decision was heavily influenced by religious extremists telling the judge, "If you release him (Aleem), then we will kill him outside."

In January 2009 an Ahmadi shopkeeper, Saeed Ahmed, was shot and killed in Kotri, Sindh Province. Ahmed was killed because of his faith, a spokesman for the Ahmadiyya community claimed in a press release.

In September 2008 authorities arrested 10 Ahmadis under Ahmadi-specific sections of the Penal Code. On October 11, 2008, eight more Ahmadis were arrested using the same case number and under the same sections of the code.

The Punjab provincial government permitted Muslim religious leaders to hold an anti-Ahmadi conference in Rabwah on September 7, 2008, on the anniversary of the constitutional amendment that declared Ahmadis as non-Muslims. In 2008, an antiterrorism court acquitted five persons who were arrested for the 2005 attack on Ahmadi worshippers in Mandi Bahauddin, Punjab that resulted in the killing of eight and injuring of 20.

In March 2008, police arrested Ahmadi Altaf Husain in Kabeerwala on charges of desecrating the Qur'an. Altaf Hussain was released in July 2008 by a District Court in Khanewal, Punjab.

There was no update in the January 2008 arrest of an Ahmadi in Wazirabad, Punjab, on charges of distributing Ahmadi-related pamphlets. He was granted bail in March 2008 and forced to leave the area after receiving numerous death threats.

In January 2008 police in Nankana Sahib, Punjab, charged an Ahmadi businessman, Manzoor Ahmed, with destroying pages that included religious inscriptions. At the end of the reporting period, he remained behind bars for destruction of holy material.

In September 2007 police accused Mumtaz Ali, an Ahmadi, of subscribing to, receiving, and subsequently distributing the newsletter of the local Ahmadiyya community. He was taken into police custody for 10 days and released because of his age. He died in October 2007, but police refused to drop the charges and threatened his family with imprisonment if the household continued to receive the newsletter. The family has left Rajan Pur, Punjab, and moved to a different city.

In November 2007 three Ahmadis were arrested in Sargodha, Punjab, on charges of proselytizing when they invited other locals to their places of worship. They were given bail in mid-February 2008. There was no update on this case at the end of the reporting period.

In December 2007 Larkana police arrested 21 Ahmadis on charges of gathering and worshipping like Muslims after neighbors told the police that they heard Islamic verses being recited in the home of one of the members. All involved were released by the end of the reporting period.

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

According to the National Commission for Justice and Peace (NCJP), in 2008 at least 75 persons were victimized in 24 cases registered under the blasphemy laws. Punjab had the largest share, with 67 percent of the blasphemy allegations and cases registered; 21 percent of the cases were reported in Sindh. Of the 75 persons, 26 were identified as Muslims, six Christians, and two Hindus. The number of Ahmadis is unknown. In addition to the Ahmadis charged in 2008, police charged the entire Ahmadi populations in Rabwah and Kotli with blasphemy in June 2008 for celebrating 100 years of Caliph-ship and constructing a mosque for the community. The NCJP stated: "Generally we do not request bail because of security. Blasphemy suspects are often safest in prison under police protection."

On June 18, 2008, Mohammad Shafeeq Latif was sentenced to death for blasphemy after he allegedly defiled the Qur'an and used derogatory language to refer to the Prophet Mohammad. Shafeeq was arrested in 2006. He remained jailed in Sialkot, Punjab.

In June 2008 six Ahmadis were arrested and charged with blasphemy in Kotri, Sindh. The arrests took place after a dispute over construction of an Ahmadiyya prayer center and protests from mullahs of Tahaffuz Khatam-e-Nabuwat, an anti-Ahmadiyya religious clerical group.

According to Compass Direct News, in May 2008 police arrested Robin Sardar, a Christian, after a mob attacked his home in Punjab because he had allegedly committed blasphemy. Sardar, who denied the charges, was held in Punjab's Gujranwala Central Jail. His wife and six children abandoned their home for fear of new attacks. According to reports, local Islamist groups threatened to kill Sardar if he was acquitted. On November 4, 2008, Sardar was released after his accuser indicated there had been a misunderstanding.

In May 2008 Muslims filed a blasphemy case against Pastor Frank John when he was conducting a religious convention at Green Town Christian Colony, Lahore, Punjab. When Christians gathered for the convention, local Muslims stated that no one would be allowed to use the speakers for prayers. The police filed a first information report (FIR) against the pastor on May 3, 2008. Pastor John was not arrested, although tensions between the Christian and Muslim communities remained.

In April 2008 in the Karachi Korangi Industrial Area, employees beat to death Jagdish Kumar, a Hindu employee, after he allegedly made blasphemous comments against Islam. Factory guards attempted to save Jagdish by taking him into protective custody, and a small contingent of police was called. The Karachi police superintendent later suspended the police officers after it was determined they did not take the appropriate actions to save the employee's life.

By the end of the reporting period, a case had been registered against Abdul Malik, a resident of Burewala, Punjab, for making derogatory remarks against the Prophet Muhammad in September 2007, but he had not been arrested. Islamic organizations staged several protests throughout Lahore, demanding that Malik be arrested and punished for the alleged blasphemy.

Younis Masih, a Christian, remained under a death sentence on blasphemy charges for allegedly insulting the Prophet Muhammad during a dispute with a Muslim cleric about loud music accompanying a nighttime religious ceremony. In May 2007, the district court in Lahore sentenced Masih to death. The case was on appeal at the end of the reporting period.

At the end of the reporting period, Sattar Masih, a Catholic Christian beaten by a mob and arrested by police in 2007 for allegedly writing blasphemous words against the Prophet Muhammad, remained in prison. Police reportedly tortured him in prison to obtain a confession.

At the end of the reporting period, Salamat Masih remained in prison and his family in hiding after officials accused him and four members of his family, all Christians from Toba Tek Singh,

of desecrating papers bearing the Prophet Muhammad's name in 2007.

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

In September 2006 police arrested five Ahmadis working for an Ahmadiyya publication, *Al Fazl*, on blasphemy charges. According to Jamaat-e-Ahmadiya, all were released but police gave them strict warnings to stop publishing. The provincial and district governments were pressured to shut down the publication activities of all Punjabi Ahmadis after this case.

In July 2006 courts released on bail Hafiz Afzal Rehman and Haji Latif, who had been held in a Lahore prison on blasphemy charges since 2004. Their trials were pending, and both men were on bail with no hearings set at the end of the reporting period.

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

There were no updates on the July 2007 case of a Chinese Uighur Muslim who was reportedly detained and forcibly returned to China. There were no reports that the individual was arrested because of his religious beliefs. There were credible reports that the Government of China has tortured and executed Uighur Muslims who have been forcibly returned.

The Government did not subject individuals to forced labor or enslavement based on religious beliefs; however, minority community leaders charged that the Government failed to take adequate action to prevent bonded labor in the brickmaking and agricultural sectors. Christians and Hindus were disproportionately victims of this illegal practice.

Forced Religious Conversion

Forced and coerced conversions of religious minorities to Islam occurred at the hands of societal actors. Religious minorities claimed government actions to stem the problem were inadequate. Representatives of the Hindu community in Sindh claim 15 to 20 Hindu families per year were subject to forced conversion (usually related to familial debts). Human rights groups highlighted the increased phenomenon of local actors kidnapping young Hindu women, particularly in Karachi and other parts of Sindh, forcing them to convert to Islam, and then forcing them to marry their kidnappers.

In September 2007 Muhammad Ramzan abducted Tahira Salamat, a Christian from Multan, forced her to convert to Islam and then to marry him. At the end of the reporting period, Salamat was living with Ramzan, and the Lahore High Court had closed the original case against Ramzan. According to the NCJP, the case was withdrawn after Salamat submitted statements that she had willingly converted and was living with her husband without any pressure.

In April 2009 a minority minister in the Sindh Assembly claimed 18 Hindu women had been abducted and forced to convert to Islam, and that one of them was allegedly killed.

According to NCJP, several cases of forced conversion and abduction were reported in Punjab Province in Faisalabad, Lahore, and Gujranwala. Of the 39 women who were abducted and forced to convert in 2008, 34 cases occurred in Lahore alone, as recorded by the NCJP. A majority of these women were Christian, and two were Hindus.

On March 29, 2009, Sana, a Christian woman, was abducted, raped, and forcibly converted to Islam in Sainwala, Punjab.

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States or who had not been allowed to be returned to the United States.

Abuses by Rebel or Foreign Forces or Terrorist Organizations

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

Sectarian violence continued in different parts of the country during the reporting period, with attacks on the Shi'a minority, particularly in D.I. Khan, Quetta, Tank, D.G. Khan, Gilgit, and Kurram Agency.

Throughout the reporting period, attacks, threats, and violence by Islamic extremists increased

across the country, especially in the NWFP.

More than 300 Sikh families left the Malakand and Swat valley area in the wake of ongoing military operations. Most of the displaced families took refuge in Gurdwara Punja Sahib in Hasanabdal. There are approximately 6,000 Sikhs in Swat, the second largest minority (after Christians) in the restive valley.

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

Throughout the reporting period, there were numerous reports of Islamic militant attacks on barber shops and stores selling music in the NWFP and FATA.

LJ continued attacks on houses of worship and religious gatherings during the reporting period.

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

On June 12, 2009, a suicide bomber attacked a mosque in Nowshera during Friday prayers, killing 10 and injuring 100 persons. On the same day, Dr. Mufti Sarfraz Naeemi and five others were killed in a suicide bomb blast at Jamia Naeemia in Lahore. Seven others were injured in the attack. According to news reports on the cleric's killing, Naeemi's followers believed he was targeted because of his vocal support of military operations against the Taliban whom he publicly opposed.

On June 5, 2009, a suicide attack at a mosque in Upper Dir killed 42 and injured 70 persons.

On June 2, 2009, Lashkar-i-Islam imposed a fee on all Sikhs, Hindus, and Christians of approximately \$12 (1,000 rupees) per year.

On April 15, 2009, the Supreme Court granted bail to Maulana Aziz, brother of Red Mosque leader Abdul Rashid Ghazi and prayer leader at the time of the 2007 confrontation between militants and the army. Aziz was awaiting trial on 27 charges ranging from abetting terrorists to illegally occupying a building. On May 2, 2009, media reported that the Capital Development Authority (CDA) allotted 12 acres of land in Islamabad for reconstruction of the Jamia Hafsa seminary, which had been demolished during the military operation in 2007. In July 2007 the Red Mosque (Lal Masjid), in Islamabad, became the focus of a bloody confrontation between the army and militants inside the mosque. The mosque leaders and thousands of male and female students in adjacent seminaries declared imposition of Shari'a as their main aim and occupied a school library. Through a series of unlawful activities, they challenged the authority of the "un-Islamic" government and called for jihad against authorities. The militants kidnapped brothel owners, policemen, and foreign massage parlor workers and announced the set-up of Islamic courts. Fighting erupted when militants fired upon security forces attempting to cordon off the mosque, resulting in the deaths of 10 security personnel and approximately 79 militants, including the mosque's leader, Abdul Rashid Ghazi. The military operation prompted the Government to renew its efforts to curb the teaching of extremism in madrassahs across the country. The Supreme Court ordered the mosque to be reopened in October 2007 and also ordered reconstruction of the madrassah.

In April 2009 the Taliban began to extort money under the guise of a jizya tax (traditionally a tax on non-Muslims paid in exchange for government protection) in Orakzai Agency, FATA. In response to extortion and attacks, some members of the Sikh community fled the area after paying approximately \$240,000 (20 million rupees) as jizya tax after the Taliban forcibly occupied their homes and kidnapped a Sikh leader, Kalyan Singh.

On April 22, 2009, a mob attacked a Christian locality, Tiaser Town, in Karachi, Sindh, after threatening signs were posted on the walls of a church stating that Christians should either convert or pay the jizya tax. One person, Irfan Masih, was killed and three others injured in the attack; several houses belonging to Christians, shops, and three churches were ransacked. The attacks came amid fears of growing Talibanization in Karachi, where minority groups had been subjected to violence in the past.

On April 11, 2009, militants occupied and closed to the public a shrine of Sufi saint Pir Baba in Buner, NWFP.

On March 13, 2009, the anti-terrorism court in Karachi released five Lashkar-i-Jhangvi activists, including Mohammad Atif, Mohammad Arshid, Mohammad Asif, and Zubairuddin Shahjeel, who had confessed to assassinating seven Christian staffers of the Committee for Justice and Peace in 2002, including Edwin Moon, its former director.

On March 5, 2009, militants blew up a 17th-century shrine of a Sufi saint and highly respected Pashto poet, Abdul Rahman Mohmand, commonly known as Rahman Baba, at Hazarkhwani,

Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The Government took steps to bolster religious freedom during the reporting period, including efforts to end the Sunni/Shi'a violence in Kurram Agency, FATA, through negotiations and peace talks.

The Government appointed Shahbaz Bhatti as Minister for Minorities Affairs and Jamshaid Rehmatullah, another Christian, as judge of the Lahore High Court. Minority groups viewed both actions as a positive sign.

In November 2008 Prime Minister Yousuf Gilani gave approval for the reformation of the National Commission for Minorities (NCM), which had been set up in 1993 to recommend steps for ensuring effective participation of minority groups in national life and to review any anti-minority discriminatory policies or laws. He also declared August 11 as National Minority Day, to mark the day when the country's founder, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, delivered his first speech to the Constituent Assembly of Pakistan, promising freedom of religion to all religious groups.

In May 2009 the Government approved a 5 percent quota in federal jobs for minorities. The Minorities Affairs Minister called the measure a milestone toward equality and opportunity for minorities in the country.

On May 28, 2009, the Government celebrated the first Minorities' Solidarity Day, including a convention in which the Prime Minister announced establishment of an interfaith complex to house a minorities' museum, a library of faiths, and a common place of worship. The Government continued to celebrate 10 religious festivals of minority groups at the national level. The Baha'i community welcomed the declaration of a holiday on their religious festival, Eid-e-Rizwan.

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

In January 2009 Adiala Jail became the first prison in the country to have a church on its premises. The local Christian community and an estimated 250 Christian inmates of the prison celebrated the construction, made possible by donations from local Christians.

On April 16, 2009, two brothers accused of blasphemy were released from prison after police and Christian groups reached an out of court settlement in Narowal, Punjab.

On April 15, 2009, Sindh Provincial Minister for Minorities Affairs Mohanlal Kohistani announced a grant of \$1.23 million (100 million rupees) as financial assistance for poor, disabled, and handicapped members of the Hindu community. The Sindh government announced it would give back the Hindu Gymkhana (sports arena) to the Hindu community.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

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

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

Ahmadi individuals and institutions long have been victims of religious violence, much of it organized by religious extremists. According to a spokesman for the Ahmadiyya community, since the promulgation of anti-Ahmadi laws in 1984, 101 Ahmadis have been killed on religious grounds.

According to the press section of the Sadr Anjuman Ahmadiyya, 1,033 anti-Ahmadiyya statements were printed in Urdu national newspapers in 2008, an increase of 59 from the previous year.

On March 14, 2009, unknown assailants killed two Ahmadi doctors, husband and wife, at their residence in Multan. According to reports, both showed signs of physical abuse, and none of their belongings were taken from their home. The Ahmadiyya community claimed the killings were religiously motivated.

On October 29, 2008, a man attacked Dr. Muhammad Aslam, an Ahmadi, at his clinic in Haripur, NWFP. According to reports, the attacker stabbed the doctor four times before being apprehended. The doctor survived.

In September 2008 a former federal minister and host of a popular religious television show declared on air that killing Ahmadis was the "Islamic duty of devout Muslims;" at least two Ahmadis were killed in Sindh within 48 hours of this declaration. Dr. Abdul Mannan Siddiqui, district president of the Ahmadiyya community in Mirpur Khas, Sindh, was killed on September 8, 2008, at his hospital in Mirpur Khas. He was attending to patients when two assailants shot him. The other victim, Seth Muhammad Yousuf, district amir of the Ahmadiyya community Nawab Shah, Sindh, was killed in broad daylight in a local bazaar. Taking serious note of the killings, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) called for urgent action to protect minorities and to stop hate-preaching in the media. At the end of the reporting period, the government continued to stall investigation into the deaths.

In September 2008 extremist elements at Kunri, Sindh, mounted a sustained campaign of agitation and persecution against Ahmadis that resulted in angry processions and attacks on Ahmadi homes. The agitators urged police to register blasphemy cases against Ahmadis. Two Ahmadis were arrested and remained incarcerated at the end of the reporting period.

An Ahmadi pharmacist, Sheikh Saeed Ahmad, was shot and killed, reportedly by religious zealots, on September 1, 2008, in Manzoor Colony, Karachi, Sindh. He died on September 13, 2008.

On September 10, 2008, an Ahmadi, Daud Ahmad Joyia, was fired several weeks after his appointment as a lecturer at Cadet College, Kallar Kahar, Punjab, when the college administration learned of his beliefs.

In September 2008 the *Tehrik-e-Khatme Nabuwwat*, based in Toba Tek Singh, Punjab, issued a Ramadan calendar that devoted nearly 70 percent of the space to hate propaganda characterizing Ahmadis as infidels, cursed, and apostates.

On June 5, 2008, the principal of Punjab Medical College (PMC) expelled 15 female Ahmadi students and eight male students accused of preaching Ahmadiyyat at the university. The same day, students at the school had gone on strike, demanding the expulsion of all Ahmadi students. The college formed a committee to resolve the case. In October 2008 the Health Department of Punjab permitted 15 of the 23 Ahmadi students to continue studies at the PMC. At the end of the reporting period they were attending the college, and the female students resided in a hostel. The Government, with approval of the Punjab Chief Minister, issued a notification for the eight other students, three male and five female, to be transferred to other colleges. No case was registered against any of the non-Ahmadi students or teachers who precipitated the strikes and riot.

In September 2008 the annual Anti-Ahmadi, Khatam-e-Nabuwwat (End of Prophethood) Conference was held in Lahore, Punjab, where clerics declared their drive against Ahmadiyyat would continue until it was eliminated from the country.

Violence against and harassment of Christians continued during the reporting period.

On April 9, 2009, the Session Court, Sargodha, ordered the arrest of a Muslim man accused of raping the daughter of one of his Christian tenants at gunpoint in a small village in Sargodha District, Punjab, on November 6, 2008.

In another case, on April 6, 2009, police arrested four of six assailants accused of attacking Christians in Cheecha Watni, Punjab, in January 2009. The perpetrators had ransacked Christian and Muslim houses in Cheecha Watni and gang-raped a 14-year-old Christian girl in front of her family. The arrests came after the victims' Muslim employer, brick kiln owner Muhammad Akram Khan, filed a lawsuit against the suspects. Khan vowed to bring to justice the two remaining suspects. Police recovered the stolen items and returned them to the Christian families.

In April 2009, at a district court in Nankana Sahib, Punjab, police cleared three men accused of raping a 13-year-old Christian girl despite eyewitness accounts and medical evidence. The girl was reportedly twice abducted and raped by Waqas Sadiq and Yousaf Sadiq with the help of Mohammad Shahbaz, and was threatened with death if she revealed the attack to authorities. Lawyers representing the victim accused the suspects' relatives of bribing police.

In May 2008, a Christian, Adeel Masih, was reportedly tortured and killed in Hafizabad by the family of a Muslim girl with whom he allegedly had a relationship. In July 2008 police arrested her father and uncle for murder, but on April 1, 2009, the Gujranwala Sessions Court cleared the suspects of all charges.

A March 2009 attack on a church and the surrounding neighborhood in Sangu-Wali, a village in Gujranwala, Punjab, left a woman dead. The attack was believed to be prompted after a Christian filed a robbery complaint against a local Muslim who, along with his friends, indiscriminately preyed on the community.

In June 2008 two sisters, ages 13 and 10, were kidnapped in Multan on their way to visit a relative. Reportedly, one of the kidnappers married the older girl and requested custody of both girls, alleging that both had willingly converted from Christianity to Islam. The older sister testified before the Lahore High Court that she was 17 years old and had converted and accepted the marriage willingly, despite her parents' assertion of her age. In September 2008 the judge decided to grant custody of the younger girl to her Christian parents and to allow the older one to make her own decision. She chose to remain with her new husband. In October 2008, the younger sister stated they had been raped and forced to convert to Islam. While traveling to and from the court in Lahore, the three lawyers who represented the family were threatened.

Hindus faced societal violence, often directed at temples, during the reporting period. In April 2009 *Dawn* newspaper reported that extremists attacked a Hindu religious festival, Holi, not far from the border with India, setting fire to a Hindu temple and destroying several shops. Societal violence was due in part to bias against Indians and those perceived to be of Indian origin.

The Hindu community living in Sindh Province reported they were increasingly the target of kidnappings for ransom; however, the incidence of abductions has risen exponentially throughout the country. Criminals targeted Hindu businessmen for abductions, particularly in Karachi, Sindh. Hindus claimed they were forced to pay ransom because police did little to recover kidnapping victims.

Despite recent attacks against Sikhs in the FATA, societal violence against the Sikh community remained comparatively rare.

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

Anti-Semitic articles were commonly found in the vernacular press, especially tabloid newspapers, although there were no known Jewish communities in the country.

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

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

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. Embassy officers maintained a dialogue with government, religious, and minority community representatives to encourage religious freedom and discuss the blasphemy laws, the Hudood Ordinance, the implementation of the NAR in the NWFP, curriculum reform in public education and madrassah education systems, treatment of the Ahmadiyya and Christian communities, and sectarian violence. Embassy officials, including the Ambassador, met with leaders from communities of all religious groups and non-governmental organizations working on religious freedom issues. Embassy officials also raised with parliamentarians the treatment of Ahmadis.

As part of its overall public education reform program, valued at \$90 million (7.27 billion rupees), the U.S. Government provided substantial financial support to the Government's curriculum reform initiative, which included eliminating the teaching of religious intolerance.