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2018 Report on International Religious Freedom: Pakistan

Executive Summary

The constitution establishes Islam as the state religion and requires all provisions of the law to be consistent with Islam. The constitution also 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.” The courts continued to enforce blasphemy laws, punishment for which ranges from life in prison to execution for a range of charges, including “defiling the Prophet Muhammad.” According to civil society reports, there were at least 77 individuals imprisoned on blasphemy charges, at least 28 of whom had received death sentences, although the government has never executed anyone specifically for blasphemy. Some of these cases began before the beginning of the year but were not previously widely known. According to data provided by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), police registered at least seven new blasphemy cases against seven individuals. On October 31, the Supreme Court acquitted Asia Bibi, a Christian woman sentenced to death for blasphemy in 2010. In what was described as an effort to end widespread violent protests orchestrated by the antiblasphemy movement Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan (TLP) against the government in the wake of Bibi’s acquittal, the government promised protestors it would not oppose a petition seeking further judicial review of the case. Following violent antistate threats, the government later undertook a sustained campaign of detentions and legal charges against the TLP leadership and violent protestors. The original accuser’s petition for a judicial review of Bibi’s case remained pending at year’s end, although most sources believed it was likely to be dismissed. In October Minister of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony Noor-ul Haq Qadri said the government would “forcefully oppose” any change to the blasphemy laws. NGOs continued to report lower courts often failed to adhere to basic evidentiary standards in blasphemy cases. Ahmadiyya Muslim community leaders and human rights organizations continued to express concerns that the government targeted Ahmadi Muslims for blasphemy, and Ahmadis continued to be affected by discriminatory and ambiguous legislation that denied them basic rights. Throughout the year, including during the general election campaign, some government officials 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, and perpetrators of such abuses often faced no legal consequences due to what the NGOs said was a lack of follow-through by law enforcement, bribes offered by

the accused, and pressure on victims to drop cases. Minority religious leaders stated members of their communities continued to experience discrimination in public schools and tertiary education, and in private and civil service employment. In September the newly-elected government withdrew its invitation to economist and Ahmadi Muslim Atif Mian to join the Economic Advisory Council after significant public criticism, including from religious leaders. In a conference organized by UN-designated terrorist Hafiz Saeed in October, Minister of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony Qadri said the “Government and the Prime Minister of Pakistan will always stand against Ahmadis.” In March the Islamabad High Court (IHC) issued a judgment requiring citizens to declare an affidavit of faith to join the army, judiciary, and civil services and directed parliament to amend laws to ensure Ahmadis did not use “Islamic” terms or have names associated with Islam.

Armed sectarian groups connected to organizations banned by the government as extremist, as well as groups designated as terrorist organizations by the United States and other governments, continued to stage attacks targeting Christians and Shia Muslims, including the predominantly Shia Hazara community. According to the South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP) however, both the number of sectarian attacks by armed groups and the number of casualties decreased compared to 2017, corresponding with an overall decline in terrorist attacks. On November 23, a suicide bombing near a Shia prayer hall in Orakzai district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa killed 33 people, including Sunni and Shia Muslims, as well as some Sikhs. Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISIS-K) claimed responsibility. There were multiple reports of targeted killings of Shia in Dera Ismail Khan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, although it was often unclear whether religion was the primary motivation. In February and May several Shia residents were killed by alleged Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) militants, the same group believed to be responsible for multiple subsequent killings in the same area in August. On April 2, gunmen shot and killed a Christian family of four traveling by rickshaw in Quetta, Balochistan. An affiliate group of ISIS-K claimed responsibility. The government continued to implement the 2014 National Action Plan (NAP) against terrorism, including countering sectarian hate speech and extremism, as well as military and law enforcement operations against terrorist groups; however, according to Ahmadi civil society organizations, the government failed to restrict advertisements or speeches inciting anti-Ahmadi violence, despite this being a component of the NAP. Civil society groups expressed ongoing concerns about the safety of religious minorities.

Throughout the year, unidentified individuals targeted and killed Shia Muslims, including ethnic Hazaras, who are largely Shia, and Ahmadi Muslims in attacks believed to be religiously motivated. The attackers’ relationship to organized terrorist groups was often unclear. According to the SATP, attacks against Shia members of the minority Hazara ethnic group decreased relative to 2017. In four separate incidents, unidentified assailants shot and killed six members of the Hazara Shia community in Quetta in April. Assailants killed a member of the Ahmadiyya community in Lahore on June 25 in what appeared to be a targeted attack, and robbers shot and killed another man in his jewelry shop in Syedwala on August 29 after singling him out as an Ahmadi. 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, including forced conversions of young women; and of societal harassment,

discrimination, and threats of violence directed at members of religious minority communities. There also continued to be reports of attacks on the holy places, cemeteries, and religious symbols of the Christian and Ahmadiyya minorities.

Senior officials from the U.S. Department of State, including the Special Advisor for Religious Minorities, the Charge d’Affaires, and embassy officers met with senior advisors to the prime minister, the minister for foreign affairs, the minister for human rights, and officials from the Ministry of Law and Justice, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony to discuss the need to combat sectarian violence, to ensure the protection of religious minorities, and blasphemy law reform. Embassy officers met with civil society leaders, local religious leaders, religious minority representatives, and legal experts to discuss ways to combat intolerance and promote dialogue on interfaith cooperation to increase religious freedom. Visiting U.S. government officials met with minority community representatives, parliamentarians, human rights activists, and members of the federal cabinet to highlight concerns regarding the treatment of the Shia, Ahmadiyya, Christian, Hindu, Sikh, and other minority communities, the application of blasphemy laws, and other forms of discrimination on the basis of religion. The U.S. government provided training for provincial police officers on human rights and protecting religious minorities. The Department of State publicly condemned terrorist attacks throughout the year, including the November attack near a Shia place of worship in Orakzai District, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

On November 28, the Secretary of State designated 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 as required in the important national interests of the United States.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the total population at 207.9 million (July 2018 estimate). According to the provisional results of a national census conducted in 2017, 96 percent of the population is Muslim. According to government figures, the remaining 4 percent includes Ahmadi Muslims (whom Pakistani law does not recognize as Muslim), Hindus, Christians, Parsis/Zoroastrians, Baha’is, Sikhs, Buddhists, Kalash, Kihals, and Jains. Most of the historic Jewish community has emigrated.

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 are generally believed to make up 15-20 percent. Unofficial estimates vary widely with regard to the size of minority religious groups. According to 2014 media accounts, although there are 2.9 million non-Muslims registered with the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA), the actual number exceeds 3.5 million. Religious community representatives estimate minority religious groups constitute 3 to 5 percent of the population.

According to the 2014 government registration documents cited by the press, there are approximately 1.4 million Hindus, 1.3 million Christians, 126,000 Ahmadis, 34,000 Baha'is, 6,000 Sikhs, and 4,000 Parsis. Taking account of the Ahmadi boycott of the official census, however, community sources put the number of Ahmadi Muslims at approximately 500,000-600,000. Estimates of the Zikri Muslim community, located in Balochistan, range between 500,000 and 800,000 individuals. Several minority rights advocacy groups dispute the provisional results of the 2017 census and state the numbers underrepresent their true population.

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.” A 1984 amendment to the penal code restricted the rights of members of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community to propagate their faith. 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 Muhammad,” life imprisonment for “defiling, damaging, or desecrating the Quran,” and 10 years’ imprisonment for “insulting another’s religious feelings.” Speech or action intended to incite religious hatred is punishable by up to seven years’ 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 (PTA) for possible removal, or to the Federal Investigative Agency (FIA) for possible criminal prosecution. In 2017 the Lahore High Court directed the government to amend PECA to align the punishments for blasphemy online with the penal code punishments for blasphemy. At years’ end the amendment was still under consideration.

The constitution defines “Muslim” as a person who “believes in the unity and oneness of Almighty Allah, in the absolute and unqualified finality of the Prophethood of Muhammad ... the last of the prophets, and does not believe in, or recognize as a prophet or religious reformer, any person who claimed or claims to be a prophet after Muhammad.” It also states “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 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. On February 7, the government of Azad Jammu and Kashmir amended its interim constitution to declare Ahmadis non-Muslim.

The penal code criminalizes “deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious beliefs” and provides for a sentence of up to 10 years in prison.

A 2015 constitutional amendment allows military courts to try civilians for terrorism, sectarian violence, and other charges; this authority was renewed in 2017 for an additional two years. The government may also use special civilian terrorism courts 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 2.5 percent *zakat* (tax) from Sunni Muslims and distributes the funds to Sunni mosques, madrassahs, and charities.

The constitution mandates 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 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 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 Pakistan: Bareilvi, Deobandi, Shia, Ahle Hadith, and the suprasectarian Jamaat-i-Islami. The *wafaqs* operate through an umbrella group, Ittehad-e-Tanzeemat-e-Madaris Pakistan (ITMP), to represent their interests to the government. The NAP requires all madrassahs to register with one of five *wafaqs* or directly with the government.

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 which is “repugnant” to Islam. The constitution states this requirement shall not affect the “personal laws of non-Muslim citizens” or their status as citizens. Most personal laws regulating marriage, divorce, and inheritance for minority communities date from pre-partition 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 empowers the FSC to review criminal cases 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 exercises “revisional jurisdiction” (the power to review of its own accord) in such cases in lower courts, a power which 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 which affect them or violate their rights if they so choose. By law, decisions of the FSC may be appealed to the Supreme Court’s Shariat Appellate Bench.

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.”

In the absence of specific language in the law authorizing civil or common law marriage, marriage certificates are signed by religious authorities and registered with the local marriage registrar. The 2016 Sindh Hindu Marriage Act and the 2017 Hindu Marriage

Act (applying to all other provinces) codified legal mechanisms to formally register and prove the legitimacy of Hindu marriages. The 2016 Sindh Hindu Marriage Act also applies to Sikh marriages. In addition to addressing a legal gap by providing documentation needed for identity registration, divorce, and inheritance, the 2017 Hindu Marriage Act allows marriages to be voided when consent “was obtained by force, coercion or by fraud.” The 2017 Hindu Marriage Act allows for the termination of the marriage upon the conversion of one party to a religion other than Hinduism. On August 8, the Sindh provincial government enacted amendments to its 2016 legislation allowing couples to seek divorce and granting Hindu women the right to remarry six months after a divorce or a spouse’s death. Before the passage of the amendments in Sindh, Hindu women were not allowed to remarry as a community custom once they were widowed, and the law did not recognize the divorce of Hindu couples.

The government considers 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. Children born to a non-Muslim couple are considered illegitimate and ineligible for inheritance if their mother converts to Islam. The only way to legitimize the marriage and the children is for the husband also 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 by law the government may take custody of the children.

The constitution directs the state to “safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of minorities,” to secure the well-being of the people irrespective of creed, and to discourage sectarian prejudices. It forbids discrimination against any religious community in the taxation of religious institutions. The National Commission 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 violations. The NCHR is also mandated to monitor the government’s implementation of human rights and review and propose legislation. It has quasi-judicial powers and may refer cases for prosecution but does not have arrest authority. The 18th Amendment, passed in 2010, expanded the powers of the prime minister and devolved responsibility for education, health care, women’s development, and 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 at the federal level.

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; however, 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 the Prophet Muhammad 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 NADRA designates religious affiliation on passports and requires religious information in national identity card and passport applications. Those wishing to be listed as Muslims must swear they believe the Prophet Muhammad 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 Muslims. All senior officials, including members of parliament, must swear an oath to protect the country’s Islamic identity. The law requires that elected Muslim officials swear an oath affirming their belief that the Prophet Muhammed is the final prophet of Islam.

There are reserved seats for religious minority members in both the national and provincial assemblies. The 342-member National Assembly has 10 reserved seats for religious minorities. The 104-member Senate has four reserved seats for religious minorities, 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 (Law of Evidence),” under which the in-court testimony of men 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 civil society reports, there were at least 77 individuals imprisoned on blasphemy charges, at least 28 under sentence of death, although the government has never executed anyone specifically for blasphemy. Some of these cases began before the beginning of the year and were not previously widely known. According to data provided by NGOs, authorities registered at least seven new blasphemy cases against seven individuals during the year. The Supreme Court acquitted two persons charged with blasphemy during the year; a third case was closed due to the death of the accused while awaiting trial, while other blasphemy cases continued without resolution. At least three individuals were accused of spreading blasphemous content through social media under a 2016 law criminalizing online blasphemy. Civil society groups continued to state that the blasphemy laws disproportionately impacted members of religious minority communities. Persons accused of blasphemy were often simultaneously charged with terrorism offenses. NGOs continued to report lower courts often failed to adhere to basic evidentiary standards in blasphemy cases.

On October 31, the Supreme Court acquitted Asia Bibi, a Christian woman sentenced to death for blasphemy in 2010. Authorities arrested Bibi in June 2009 after a group of Muslim women with whom she was arguing accused her of blasphemy against the Prophet Muhammad. In a supporting opinion, Justice Asif Saeed Khosa criticized the false testimony of the prosecution witnesses and warned that the witnesses’ insults to Bibi’s religion combined with false testimony was also “not short of being blasphemous.” While Bibi was officially released from jail following the Supreme Court ruling, she remained in government’s protective custody because of threats to her life. Media reported that her family went into hiding after the verdict.

The Supreme Court ruling on the Bibi case was followed by three days of violent, nationwide protests by the antiblasphemy movement TLP, whose leaders called for the assassination of the judges who ruled in the case. On October 31, immediately after the verdict, Prime Minister Imran Khan condemned threats against the judiciary and military and said the government would act, if necessary, to counter disruptions by protesters. Minister of State for Interior Shehryar Afridi, however, blamed violence during the protests on opposition parties, rather than the TLP, and said the government would seek dialogue with the TLP. Protestors sought a judicial review of the court’s judgement, for which Bibi’s original accuser later petitioned. In what was described as an effort to end the violent protests, the government pledged it would not oppose further judicial review of the case; the review remained pending at year’s end. The government later undertook a sustained campaign of detentions and legal charges against TLP leadership and violent protestors. It characterized its crackdown as an assertion that laws and courts rather than street justice would prevail when blasphemy charges were under consideration. The original accuser’s petition for a judicial review of Bibi’s case remained pending at year’s end, although most sources believed it was likely to be dismissed.

Media reported that a Lahore district judge sentenced two Christian brothers from Lahore, Qaisar and Amoon Ayub, to death on December 13 for insulting the Prophet Mohammed in articles and portraits posted on their website in 2010. The brothers had been in Jhelum Prison since 2014.

In January authorities in Lahore arrested two young Christian cousins, Patras and Sajid Masih, for alleged blasphemy after protestors threatened to burn them and their family home with gasoline. Family members said Patras Masih had been framed for blasphemy on social media when he took his mobile phone to a repair shop, while media said he got into a dispute with Muslim youths over a cricket match. Sajid Masih was severely injured after jumping from the fourth floor window of an FIA interrogation room. According to media reports, he said police tortured him and ordered him to sexually assault his cousin, and he leaped out the window to escape. Patras Masih remained in custody, and many Christian families fled the neighborhood.

According to NGOs, the Lahore High Court’s Rawalpindi bench postponed hearing the appeal of Zafar Bhatti multiple times. Bhatti, a Christian, was sentenced to life in prison for allegedly sending blasphemous text messages in 2012.

In October police arrested a Muslim man in Sadiqabad, Khanewal District, Punjab, who claimed to be the “11th Caliph.” Police arrested the man and charged him with blasphemy after videos of his statements circulated online. At year’s end, he was awaiting trial.

Courts again overturned some blasphemy convictions upon appeal, after the accused had spent years in prison. On March 13, Punjab provincial judges acquitted Christian school director Anjum Sandhu of blasphemy after an Anti-Terror Court (ATC) sentenced him to death in 2016. According to media reports, two men had fabricated a recording of what was termed blasphemous speech and attempted to use it to extort money from Sandhu. When Sandhu went to police to register a complaint of extortion, police had demanded more money from Sandhu and brought a blasphemy case against him.

According to NGOs and media reports, individuals convicted in well-publicized blasphemy cases from previous years – including Nadeem James, Prakash Kumar, Taimoor Raza, Mubasher, Ghulam, and Ehsan Ahmed, Sawan Masih, Shafqat Emmanuel, Shagufta Kausar, Sajjad Masih Gill, and Liaquat Ali – remained in jail and continued to await action on their appeals.

In February an ATC convicted 31 individuals for their role in the 2017 killing of university student Mashal Khan for alleged blasphemy. The ATC sentenced the primary shooter to death, five others to life in prison, and 25 individuals to four years’ imprisonment. The Peshawar High Court later suspended the sentences and released on bail the group of 25 individuals.

Authorities charged 15 Ahmadis in connection with the practice of their faith during the year, according to Ahmadiyya Muslim community leaders. Among these, two Ahmadis were arrested and charged with blasphemy, and two others were charged for offering a sacrifice at Eid al-Adha. According to Ahmadiyya community members and media reports, authorities took no action to prevent attacks on mosques or punish assailants who demolished, damaged, forcibly occupied, or set Ahmadi mosques on fire. The government sealed an Ahmadi mosque in Sialkot on May 14. Social media videos of a crowd demolishing the mosque on May 24 showed a city administration official taking part in the demolition and thanking local authorities, including the police, for their “support” in allowing the crowd to attack the site. According to the media reports, the official was a member of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, which assumed power later in the year, although the party denied this and condemned the attack.

In September the newly-elected government withdrew its invitation to economist and Ahmadi Muslim Atif Mian to join the Economic Advisory Council after significant public criticism, including from religious leaders. Clerics urged the government to take further steps to ensure no Ahmadis could serve in key government positions. In a conference organized by UN-designated terrorist Hafiz Saeed in October, Minister of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony Qadri said the “Government and the Prime Minister of Pakistan will always stand against Ahmadis.” In March the IHC issued a judgment requiring citizens to declare an affidavit of faith to join the army, judiciary, and civil services and directed parliament to amend laws to ensure Ahmadis did not use “Islamic” terms or have names associated with Islam. Neither the National Assembly nor the

Senate had acted on this judgment by year's end, but Ahmadiyya community representatives said the NADRA began requiring Ahmadis to declare in an affidavit that they are non-Muslims to obtain a national identification card, another requirement of the IHC judgment.

According to civil society and media reports, there were instances in which the government intervened in cases of intercommunal mob violence. In September government officials negotiated a “peace accord” in Faisalabad, Punjab, after a dispute between largely Sunni Muslim and Ahmadi Muslim youths led to an attack on an Ahmadi mosque. The agreement bound both sides to eschew further violence but required the Ahmadis to pay for the damage to their mosque.

Police also intervened on multiple occasions to quell mob violence directed at individuals accused of blasphemy. On April 19, a crowd surrounded a family in Karachi, reportedly believing they were the source of blasphemous graffiti. Police moved the family to a safe location, registered a blasphemy case against “unknown subjects,” and dispersed the crowd. According to media reports, in August police prevented a crowd from setting fire to Christian homes in Gujranwala after a Christian man, Farhan Aziz, was arrested for allegedly sending blasphemous text messages.

On July 31, police filed charges against Parachand Kohli, a 19-year-old Hindu man in Mirpurkhas, Sindh, for posting blasphemous remarks on Facebook. Local journalists reported that the suspect was deeply upset by his sister's conversion to Islam and the intent of other family members to convert.

More than 40 Christian men remained in Kot Lakhpat Jail in Lahore, accused of lynching two Muslim men after terrorists bombed two Christian churches in March 2015. An ATC indicted the men on charges of murder and terrorism in 2016. The trial had not concluded at year's end, and media and other sources reported that the deputy district prosecutor offered to drop charges against anyone who would convert to Islam. Multiple legal advocacy groups representing the men reported conditions in the jail continued to be poor and had already contributed to the death of two prisoners in previous years.

Historically, Hindu and Sikh leaders had noted the legal uncertainty surrounding the process of registering marriages for their communities created difficulties for Hindu and Sikh women in obtaining inheritances, accessing health services, voting, obtaining a passport, and buying or selling property. Observers stated the enactment of the 2016 Sindh Hindu Marriage Act and its 2018 amendments and the 2017 Hindu Marriage Act addressed many of these problems and also codified the right to divorce. In September the first intercaste Hindu marriage in Sindh was registered under the 2016 Sindh Hindu Marriage Act, and media cited the law as helping the intercaste couple contract their free-will marriage despite community opposition.

Religious minorities said they remained concerned that government action to address coerced conversions of religious minorities to Islam was inadequate. Minority rights activists in Sindh cited the failure to pass a 2016 Sindh bill against forced conversions as an example of government retreating in the face of pressure from religious parties.

Media and NGOs, however, reported some cases of law enforcement helping in situations of attempted forced conversion. In March the Center for Legal Aid, Assistance and Settlement (CLAAS) reported one victim of a forced marriage and conversion, Kinza, obtained a restraining order against her husband after she returned to her parents' home. She had previously testified in court that she wanted to live with her Muslim husband. On October 23, police recovered an 11-year-old Hindu girl in Matiari, Sindh two days after she was abducted by a Muslim man who claimed he had married her after she converted to Islam. The girl told police she was abducted and raped. According to local police, the court returned the girl to her family and charged the accused with abduction, then released him on bail.

The government selectively enforced its previous bans on the activities of, and membership in, some religiously oriented groups it judged to be extremist or terrorist. The Ministry of Interior maintained multitier schedules of groups 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). In February then President Mamnoon Hussain issued a decree to ban UN-listed Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD, a political front of terrorist organization Lashkar-e-Tayyiba) and its charity wing Falah-i-Insaniyat Foundation, but did not place either group on Schedule 1, which would have mandated the government detain group leader Hafiz Saeed. The ban lapsed in October after the government failed to convert the presidential decree into law. Other groups including LeJ, Sipah-i-Sahaba Pakistan, and Jaish-e-Muhammad remained on Schedule 1, but groups widely believed to be affiliated with them continued to operate to various degrees. The government permitted some of these parties and individuals affiliated with banned organizations to contest the July 25 general elections, including anti-Shia group Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat (ASWJ), whose ban the Ministry of Interior lifted shortly before the elections.

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 Muhammad.

While the law required a senior police official to investigate any blasphemy charge before a complaint could be filed, NGOs and legal observers continued to state that police did not uniformly follow this procedure, and that if an objective investigation were carried out by a senior authority, many blasphemy cases would be dismissed. According to religious organizations and human rights groups, while the majority of those convicted of blasphemy were Muslim, religious minorities continued to be disproportionately accused of blasphemy relative to their small percentage of the population. NGOs and legal observers also stated police continued not to file charges against many individuals who made false blasphemy accusations.

In October proposed amendments to the penal code to discourage individuals from making false blasphemy accusations, initiated by the Senate Human Rights Committee in December 2016, failed after the ruling PTI party withdrew support. Senior PTI leaders requested adjournment of discussion of the amendments in the National Assembly and the Senate in September and October, and the media reported Minister of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony Qadri said PTI members would “forcefully oppose” any change to the blasphemy laws. Despite an August 2017 directive from the IHC, the parliament took no public action to amend the penal code to make the penalties for false accusations of blasphemy commensurate with those for committing blasphemy, and the PTI withdrew the related bill in September.

Some sources said there were instances in which government entities, including law enforcement entities, were complicit in the practice of initiating blasphemy complaints against neighbors, peers, or business associates to intimidate them or to settle personal grievances. Legal observers also said some police failed to adhere to legal safeguards and basic evidentiary standards in blasphemy cases. Sometimes lower-ranking police would file charges of blasphemy, not a senior police superintendent who had more authority to dismiss baseless claims, as required by law, or a thorough investigation would not be carried out. At the same time, media reports and legal observers said some authorities took steps to protect individuals from unfounded accusations of blasphemy, often at risk to their own safety.

Ahmadiyya leaders continued to report the government hindered Ahmadis from obtaining legal documents and pressured community members to deny their beliefs by requiring individuals wishing to be listed as Muslim on identity cards and passports to swear the Prophet Muhammad was the final prophet of Islam and the Ahmadiyya movement’s founder was a false prophet. Ahmadiyya community representatives reported the word “Ahmadi” was written on their passports if they identified themselves as such. According to Ahmadiyya leaders, the government effectively disenfranchised their community by requiring voters to swear an oath affirming the “finality of prophethood”, something against Ahmadi belief, in order to register as Muslims. Since voters who registered as Ahmadis were kept on a separate voter list, they said they were more exposed to threats and physical intimidation, and many Ahmadis continued their longstanding boycott of the political process by not voting in the July 25 general elections.

Members of the Sikh community reported that although the Sindh Hindu Marriage Act covers registration of Sikh marriages, they were seeking a separate Sikh law so as not to be considered part of the Hindu religion. Some local administrative bodies continued to deny Christian and Ahmadi marriage registrations; advocates called for a new law governing Christian marriages, as the existing regulation dated to 1872.

The government continued to fund and facilitate Hajj travel for most Muslims, but Ahmadis were unable to participate in the Hajj, community leaders said, because of passport application requirements to list religious affiliation and denounce the Ahmadiyya prophet.

The government continued to prohibit citizens, regardless of religious affiliation, from traveling to 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 – was located in Israel.

According to media reports and law enforcement contacts, in the weeks leading up to and during the Islamic month of Muharram – religiously significant for Shia Muslims – authorities at the federal and provincial levels restricted the movement and activities of dozens of clerics on the Ministry of Interior’s Schedule 4. According to civil society and media reports, the government restricted the movement and activities of these individuals because they were known for exacerbating sectarian tensions. Provincial governments deployed hundreds of thousands of police and other security personnel to protect Shia religious ceremonies across the country during the commemoration of Ashura, which passed peacefully for the second year in a row.

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. They also stated the system discouraged the election of minority women, who were rarely in a position of sufficient influence within the major political parties to contend for a seat. In the July 25 general elections, Mahesh Kumar Malani became the first Hindu to be directly elected to the National Assembly rather than picked for a reserved seat, 16 years after non-Muslims won the right to vote and contest for general seats. Another Hindu candidate, Hari Ram Kishori Lal, was directly elected to the Sindh Provincial Assembly in the general elections.

The requirement that Muslim elected officials swear an oath affirming their belief that the Prophet Muhammed is the final prophet of Islam continued to discourage Ahmadi Muslims from seeking public office. In order to seek office, Ahmadis would be forced to do so as non-Muslims, despite self-identifying as Muslim.

The government continued to permit limited non-Muslim foreign missionary activity and to allow missionaries to proselytize as long as they did not preach against Islam and they acknowledged they were not Muslim. According to the government’s immigration website, it grants visas to foreign missionaries valid from one to two years and allows two entries into the country per year, although only “replacement” visas for those taking the place of departing missionaries were available for missionaries seeking to enter the country for the first time. Non-Muslim missionaries, some of whom had been working in the country for many years, said they continued to be denied visas, given short extensions, or received no response from immigration authorities before their visas expired. Others were allowed to remain in the country while appeals of their denials were pending.

The government continued its campaign against blasphemy on social media, although with less intensity than in 2017. Media observers reported a decline in political statements and in the number of text messages sent by the PTA warning them that uploading or sharing blasphemous content on social media were punishable offenses

under the law. The decline in political rhetoric and official warnings corresponded with the conclusion of general elections on July 25; however, the broader crackdown on online blasphemous content continued. In July the Senate directed the PTA to immediately block all websites and pages containing blasphemous material, due to what was reported to be increased concern regarding blasphemous content on social media. In a 2017-2018 report, the PTA stated it had blocked 31,963 websites for containing blasphemous material. Human rights activists continued to express concern the government would use this initiative as a pretext to suppress views on the internet that differed from those of the government, including on religious issues.

According to representatives of some minority religious groups, the government continued to allow organized religious groups to establish places of worship and train members of the clergy. Although there continued to be no official restriction on the construction of Ahmadiyya places of worship, local authorities regularly denied requisite construction permits, and Ahmadis remained forbidden to call them mosques.

According to Ahmadiyya community members, Ahmadi mosques previously sealed by the government and later demolished remained sealed and unrepaired.

Legal experts and NGOs continued to state that the full legal framework for minority rights remained unclear. While the Ministry of Law and Justice was officially responsible for ensuring the legal rights of all citizens, in practice the Ministry for Human Rights assumed primary responsibility for the protection of the rights of religious minorities. The NCHR was also mandated to conduct investigations into allegations of human rights abuses, but legal sources said the commission had little power to enforce its requests.

Members of religious minority communities said there continued to be inconsistent application of laws safeguarding minority rights and enforcement of protections of religious minorities at both the federal and provincial levels by the federal Ministry of Law and Justice, as well as by the federal Ministry of Human Rights and its provincial counterparts. They also stated the government was inconsistent in safeguarding against societal discrimination and neglect, and official discrimination against Christians, Hindus, Sikhs, and Ahmadiyya Muslims persisted to varying degrees, with Ahmadiyya Muslims experiencing the worst treatment.

Legal observers continued to raise concerns regarding the failure of lower courts to adhere to basic evidentiary standards in blasphemy cases, which led to some convicted persons spending years in jail before higher courts overturned their convictions and freed them for lack of evidence. According to legal advocacy groups, lower courts reportedly continued to conduct proceedings in an intimidating atmosphere, with members of antiblasphemy groups such as the TLP often threatening the defendant's attorneys, family members, and supporters. These observers said the general refusal of lower courts to free defendants on bail or acquit them persisted due to fear of reprisal and vigilantism. Legal observers also reported judges and magistrates often delayed or continued trials indefinitely in an effort to avoid confrontation with, or violence from, groups provoking protests.

In January then-Minister of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony Sardar Muhammad Yousuf declared 2018 the year of “*Khatm-e-Nabuwat*” (finality of the Prophet), a theological declaration frequently used to target Ahmadi Muslims. The minister called for seminaries and universities to establish “*Khatm-e-Nabuwat* chairs” and elevate the topic in their curricula. Multiple *Khatm-e-Nabuwat* conferences held in Lahore in January, March, and November, as well as in Islamabad and at other religious sites around the country, attracted politicians and government officials. According to media reports, Prime Minister Khan spoke at *Khatm-e-Nabuwat* conferences in Islamabad in January and October. On March 8, Yousuf and several Islamic clerics attended another *Khatm-e-Nabuwat* conference in Lahore’s Badshahi Mosque.

Minority religious leaders stated members of their communities continued to experience discrimination in admission to colleges and universities. Ahmadi representatives said the wording of the declaration students needed to sign on their applications for admission to university continued to prevent Ahmadis from declaring themselves as Muslims. Their refusal to sign the statement meant they were automatically disqualified from fulfilling the admissions requirements. The government said Ahmadis could qualify for admission as long as they did not claim to be Muslims. Ahmadiyya community leaders reported an Ahmadi graduate student was expelled from the National Institute of Biotechnology in September after not disclosing her religious affiliation at her initial admission.

Religious minority community members stated public schools gave Muslim students bonus grade points for memorizing the Quran, but there were no analogous opportunities for extra academic credit available for religious minority students.

Most religious minority groups said they continued to face discrimination in government hiring. While there remained a 5 percent quota for hiring religious minorities at the federal level, minority organizations said government employers did not enforce it. According to religious minority members and media reports, provincial governments in Punjab, Sindh, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa also failed to meet such quotas for hiring religious minorities into the civil service. Minority rights activists said almost all government job advertisements for janitorial staff listed being non-Muslim as a requirement. Minority rights activists criticized these advertisements as discriminatory and insulting.

Representatives of religious minorities said a “glass ceiling” continued to prevent their promotion to senior government positions. Although there were no official obstacles to advancement of minority religious group members in the military service, they said in practice non-Muslims rarely rose above the rank of colonel and were not assigned to senior positions.

According to civil society activists and monitoring organizations, most public school textbooks continued to include derogatory statements about minority religious groups, including Ahmadi Muslims, Hindus, Jews, and Christians. In September the prime minister held a meeting with minority religious leaders and heard their requests for the removal of discriminatory content in educational curricula. Federal ministers said they had begun a review of textbooks for derogatory material, but minority faith

representatives said the government had not consulted them in the process, and feared problematic content would remain in curricula. Ahmadiyya community representatives said local associations of clerics frequently distributed anti-Ahmadi stickers to school districts to place on textbooks, and the school boards usually accepted them. These stickers contained phrases such as “It is strictly prohibited in Sharia to speak to or do any business with Qadianis,” “The first sign of love of the Prophet is total boycott of Qadianis,” and “If your teacher is a Qadiani, refuse learning from him.”

The National Commission for Justice and Peace (NCJP), the Catholic Church’s human rights body in Pakistan, reported that subjects such as social studies and languages had almost 40 percent religious material which non-Muslim students were required to study. While schools were required to teach Islamic studies and the Quran to Muslim students, sources reported many non-Muslim students were in practice also required to participate, as their schools did not offer parallel courses in their own religious beliefs or ethics. The government did not permit Ahmadis to teach Islamic studies in public schools.

Some prominent politicians engaged in anti-Ahmadi rhetoric during the general election campaign that Ahmadi Muslims said incited violence against members of their community. Then-candidate Imran Khan said no one who does not believe Muhammad is the last prophet can call themselves a Muslim. PTI candidate Amir Liaquat Hussain printed campaign posters calling himself the “Savior of the End of Prophethood.” PTI leader Pervez Khattak told a political rally in Peshawar he had made a chapter on the finality of prophethood compulsory in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa textbooks. In Chakwal, Punjab, a Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) candidate called for expelling Ahmadis from Pakistan, and the PTI candidate asked voters whether they would stand with those who would change the *Khatm-e-Nabuwat* law, or with the lovers of the prophet.

On August 17, Chief of Army Staff General Qamar Javed Bajwa hosted Catholic and Church of Pakistan (Protestant) leaders in honor of the elevation of Archbishop of Karachi Joseph Coutts as a cardinal in the Catholic Church. Bajwa expressed appreciation for the role Christians played in the country’s public institutions and armed forces and urged greater interfaith harmony. Federal Minister for Defense Production Zubaida Jalal also spoke at a reception for Coutts and paid tribute to the contributions of religious minorities in education and social work. Sources reported military officials and Islamic clerics attended Christmas services at churches in Quetta to show support one year after the bombing of Bethel Memorial Methodist Church. Authorities also provided enhanced security for churches and Christian neighborhoods during the Christmas season.

In September leading to and during the days of ninth and tenth Muharram (September 20-21), the government condemned sectarianism and urged all Muslims to respect Shia processions around the Ashura holiday. Prime Minister Khan gave a nationwide address upholding the martyrdom of Hussein at Karbala as an example of sacrifice for the greater good, and President Arif Alvi called on Muslims of all sects to resist oppression. Law enforcement deployed extra security around Shia processions in major cities throughout Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Balochistan provinces, including for Hazara Shia communities in Quetta. According to civil society contacts,

authorities also restricted the movement and public sermons of both Sunni and Shia clerics accused of provoking sectarian violence. The government placed some clerics on the Schedule 4, a list of proscribed persons based on reasonable suspicion of terrorism or sectarian violence, and temporarily detained others under the Maintenance of Public Order Act.

During Hindu celebrations of Holi in March, authorities also provided enhanced security at Hindu temples throughout the country.

There were continued reports that some madrassahs taught violent extremist doctrine. Increasing government supervision of madrassahs remained a component of the NAP, and there was evidence the government continued efforts to increase regulation of the sector. The National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA) stated in May that it had nearly completed a mapping process of places of worship and madrassahs throughout the country and that it was developing registration forms in consultation with ITMP.

Security analysts and madrassah reform proponents observed many madrassahs failed to register with one of five *wafaqs* or with the government, to provide the government with documentation of their sources of funding, or to accept foreign students only with valid student visas, a background check, and the consent of their governments, as required by law. The provincial Balochistan government announced in February it had registered over 2,500 madrassas in 2017. It stated, however, that it had not yet registered madrassas located in so-called “backward (rural) areas.” According to media reports, the Sindh provincial government’s efforts to register madrassahs were met with resistance. Some Karachi madrassahs declined to provide data about their operations, staff, and students to Sindh Police Special Branch personnel. An ITMP spokesperson stated the *wafaqs* did not object in principle to providing the requested information, but wanted greater coordination from the government before doing so. Police reportedly agreed to suspend the attempts at data collection.

The Ministry of Interior reported it continued to prosecute counterterrorism actions under the NAP, which included an explicit goal of countering sectarian hate speech and extremism, by arresting people for hate speech, closing book shops, and confiscating loudspeakers. In January NACTA launched an app called “Surfsafe” to help citizens report websites that published extremist content and hate speech. Activists asserted that many of the groups banned by NACTA for involvement in terrorism continued openly using Facebook to recruit and train followers, including sectarian groups responsible for attacks on members of religious minority communities.

While print and broadcast media outlets continued to occasionally publish and broadcast anti-Ahmadi rhetoric, unlike in previous years, there were no reports of advertisements or speeches in the mainstream media inciting anti-Ahmadi violence. Observers stated it was unclear if this was due to self-censorship by media outlets fearing repercussions for any political disturbance, or if the government specifically fulfilled its promise from the NAP to restrict such calls for anti-Ahmadi violence. Anti-Ahmadi rhetoric that could incite violence continued to exist in some media outlets. In June TLP leader Khadim Hussain Rizvi broadcast on YouTube that Ahmadis should

either “recite the Kalima (Islamic statement of faith) or accept death.” JuD leader Hafiz Saeed was quoted in the Islamist publication *The Daily Ausaf* as saying “Qadianis are open enemies of Islam and Pakistan.”

The status of a National Commission for Minorities remained unclear at year’s end. Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony representatives said the commission continued to exist and met yearly. Minority activists stated this commission’s effectiveness was hindered by the lack of a regular budget allocation and the lack of an independent chairperson, as well as resistance from the ministry. NGOs and members of the National Assembly put forth various proposals and bills to establish a new independent National Commission for Minorities’ Rights, as directed by the Supreme Court in 2014. The ministry also proposed its own bill that would establish a “National Commission for Interfaith Harmony,” and stated that minority affairs had been devolved to the provinces since 2010. According to media reports, a subcommittee of the National Assembly’s Standing Committee on Religious Affairs met in April to merge bills for the new commission’s development. The ministry pledged to work with parliamentarians to combine the bills, and sources reported that work was ongoing at year’s end. A similar bill in the Sindh Provincial Assembly was also pending at year’s end.

Human rights activists continued to state that neither the federal nor most provincial governments had made substantial progress in implementing the Supreme Court’s 2014 decision directing the government to take measures to protect members of minority religious groups, citing the failures to establish an empowered National Commission for Minorities and a special task force to protect minority places of worship as primary examples. According to various sources, the Sindh government conducted a province-wide audit of security at 1,899 minority places of worship and made recommendations to increase security to the Sindh Home Department. Several activists and pastors reported improved provision of security at places of worship, notably in Lahore, Peshawar, and Quetta during the major holidays of Holi, Ashura, and Christmas.

Religious minority community leaders continued to state the government failed to take adequate action to protect minorities from bonded labor in the brick-making and agricultural sectors, an illegal practice in which victims were disproportionately Christians and Hindus. Such families, particularly on agricultural lands in Sindh Province, often lived without basic facilities and were prevented from leaving without the permission of farm landlords.

Abuses by Foreign Forces and Nonstate Actors

According to civil society and the media, there continued to be violence and abuses committed by armed sectarian groups connected to organizations banned by the government, including LeJ, Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), and ASWJ (previously known as Sipah-e-Sahaba), as well as abuses by individuals and groups such as ISIS-K designated as terrorist organizations by the United States and other governments. These groups continued to stage attacks targeting Christians and Shia Muslims, including the predominantly Shia Hazara community. According to the SATP, however, both the number of sectarian attacks by armed groups and the number of casualties

decreased compared to 2017, corresponding with an overall decline in terrorist attacks. Data on sectarian attacks varied, as there was no standardized definition of what constituted a sectarian attack among reporting organizations. According to the SATP, at least 39 persons were killed and 62 injured in nine incidents of sectarian violence by extremist groups during the year.

Sectarian violent extremist groups continued to target Shia houses of worship, religious gatherings, religious leaders, and other individuals in attacks resulting in at least 41 persons killed during the year. On November 23, a bomb blast near a Shia place of worship in Orakzai District, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa killed 33 people, including Sunni and Shia Muslims, as well as three Sikhs, and injured 56. ISIS-K claimed responsibility for the attack.

There were multiple reports of targeted killings of Shia in Dera Ismail Khan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, although observers stated it was often unclear whether religion was the primary motivation, or whether other disputes could have been a factor. In February and May alleged LeJ militants killed several Shia residents. According to the media, on August 9, the same group was believed to be responsible for the subsequent killing of three individuals in the same area.

On April 2, gunmen shot and killed a Christian family of four traveling by auto-rickshaw in Quetta, Balochistan. On April 15, unidentified attackers sprayed gunfire as Christians exited a church in Quetta, killing two more. An affiliate group of ISIS-K claimed responsibility for both attacks, although some speculated the attackers were individuals from LeJ operating on behalf of ISIS-K.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

Throughout the year, unidentified individuals assaulted and killed Shia, including predominantly Shia Hazaras, and Ahmadis in attacks sources believed to be religiously motivated. The attackers' relationship to organized terrorist groups was often unclear. According to the SATP, attacks against Shia members of the minority Hazara ethnic group decreased relative to 2017.

In April six Shia Hazaras were killed in four targeted drive-by shooting incidents in Quetta, Balochistan. The killings sparked sustained protest by Quetta's ethnic Hazara community, who stated that at least 509 Hazaras were killed and 627 were injured in Quetta from 2012 to 2017. Chief of Army Staff Bajwa met with protest leaders in May, and police subsequently provided additional security in Quetta to protect religious minorities from attack. Although the violence subsided, some Quetta Hazara community members complained that increased security measures had turned their neighborhoods into isolated ghettos.

On May 22, Charan Jeet Singh, a leader of the Sikh community in Peshawar and an interfaith activist, was shot and killed by an unknown assailant in his Peshawar store.

On June 1, two gunmen shot and killed Naresh Kumar, a Hindu tailor, in his shop in Gwadar, Balochistan. Two other Hindu tailors were killed in the drive-by shooting. The motive of the assailants was unknown, and there were no arrests reported.

According to Ahmadiyya community representatives, there were two instances of what appeared to be targeted killings of Ahmadiyya community members by unknown individuals. On June 25, masked gunmen entered Qazi Shaban Ahmad Khan's home in Lahore and shot and killed him. Community representatives said Khan had been threatened by the cleric of a nearby mosque in the preceding days. On August 29, armed robbers raided an Ahmadi-owned jewelry shop in Syedwala, killing Muhammad Zafrullah. According to community representatives, police chased the robbers and killed three of them.

There were numerous reports from Christian legal defense activists of young Christian women being abducted and raped by Muslim men. Victims said their attackers singled them out as vulnerable due to their Christian identity. The Pakistan Center for Law and Justice (PCLJ) stated in January a 28-year-old Muslim farm worker raped a 13-year-old Christian girl working as a sweeper at the same farm. When the girl's father registered a complaint with local police, the accused reportedly told him to withdraw the complaint or the accused would rape his other daughters. According to CLAAS and the PCLJ, although the victims filed reports with local police, they were treated similarly to most rape cases, in which the cases rarely went to trial or received a verdict due to threats from the accused party's family, lack of witnesses, or lack of interest from police.

Sources stated that some police branches took actions to improve conviction rates and overall service to victims of rape, regardless of religious affiliation. Inspectors general of police in Islamabad and each province introduced women's desks at some police stations. Islamabad and Sindh police created formal standard operating procedures and trained policewomen for registering rape complaints. The procedures instruct the policewoman to accompany the victim to a hospital, unless the victim objected, in order to obtain DNA evidence. Despite these changes, by law, to obtain a conviction for rape, the prosecution needed to have corroborating witnesses, and legal experts stated that rape remained among the most difficult cases to prove in court.

According to CLAAS and PCLJ, there were reports of minority women being physically attacked when they spurning a man's advances. In March Tahir Abbas, a Muslim man, threw Christian high school student Benish Paul from a second-story window and severely injured her. Abbas had urged Paul to convert and marry him. CLAAS stated that police took no action against the accused, and blamed the victim. In April in Sialkot 25-year-old Christian woman Asma Yaqoob suffered extensive burns when Muhammad Rizwan Gujjar threw gasoline on her and lit a match; she died in a hospital two days later. Legal activists said she had refused her attacker's repeated demands to convert and marry.

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, a local NGO, said forced conversions of young women of minority faiths, often lower caste Hindu minor girls, continued to occur. The group reported Hindu girls were being kidnapped, forcibly converted to Islam, and married to Muslim men. The Hindu Marriage Act, 2017 formally recognized

Hindu marriages across the country, which many activists said they viewed as beneficial to preventing forced conversions and marriages of women who were already married. However, the law also allowed for the termination of the marriage upon the conversion of one party to a religion other than Hinduism.

There were media reports of numerous incidents of societal violence related to allegations of blasphemy. Following the Supreme Court verdict acquitting Asia Bibi of blasphemy charges, TLP leaders called for the assassination of the Supreme Court judges who ruled in the case and organized three days of nationwide protests that included damage to property and burning of vehicles.

In January a student in Charsadda, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, killed his teacher for marking him absent when he protested with the TLP, claiming the teacher committed blasphemy for opposing his activities.

The Express Tribune reported protesters gathered outside the home of an 18-year-old Christian man in Shahdara, Punjab in February. According to media reports, the crowd accused the man of circulating blasphemous content on social media. According to a post on social media, the crowd carried gasoline and threatened to burn all the houses of Christians. Police ended the protest by charging the man with blasphemy. The report said many Christian families fled the village out of fear. *Pakistan Today* reported that in September in Gujar Khan, Punjab, assailants attacked a Christian family in their home, beat them, looted jewelry and other valuables, and set the family's house and van on fire. The attackers reportedly wanted to take the land for themselves and claimed the patronage of a powerful local politician. The Gujar Khan Police filed an incident report against 12 men, but only some were in custody at year's end. The PCLJ provided legal assistance to the family. According to activists, the attackers threatened the family with a false blasphemy accusation if they did not withdraw their case.

Reports continued of attempts to coerce religious minorities to convert to Islam. Rights activists reported victims of forced marriage and conversion were pressured and threatened into saying publicly they had entered into the marriage of their own free will. Christian and Hindu organizations stated that young women from their communities were particularly vulnerable to forced conversions. A report during the year by the NCHR said that Kalash youth were under pressure from Muslim school teachers to convert, and that 80 percent of Kalash converts to Islam were minors.

Throughout the year, Islamic organizations with varying degrees of political affiliation held conferences and rallies to support the doctrine of *Khatm-e-Nabuwat*. The events, which were often covered by English and vernacular media, featured anti-Ahmadiyya rhetoric, including the incitement of violence against Ahmadis. Speakers at these conferences called on the government to “stop the support of the Qadianis.” Conference speakers also asked the government to refrain from changing the current blasphemy law.

Ahmadis continued to report widespread societal harassment and discrimination against members of their community, especially during the summer election campaign, according to media and Ahmadiyya community reports.

On July 17, human rights activist and candidate for national and provincial assemblies Jibran Nasir faced a crowd in Karachi demanding he label Ahmadis as non-Muslim and state his own religious affiliation. Following his refusal to do so, the crowd reportedly became increasingly agitated, and police intervened. There were no injuries or arrests, but Nasir continued to receive threats for his positions supporting Ahmadis.

Christian activists continued to report widespread discrimination against Christians in private employment. They said Christians had difficulty finding jobs other than those involving menial labor; some advertisements for menial jobs even specified they were open only to Christian applicants.

According to the NCJP, the 2016 execution of Mumtaz Qadri, who was convicted of killing then-Governor of Punjab Province Salman Taseer in 2011 after Taseer publicly criticized the country’s blasphemy laws, and the 2018 Supreme Court acquittal of Asia Bibi continued to spur TLP and other religious groups to defend the blasphemy laws, sometimes by seeking out alleged blasphemers themselves. Thousands of persons continued to pay homage at Qadri’s grave, which his family had turned into a shrine, including Punjab Provincial Minister of Information Fayyaz ul Hassan Chohan, who was recorded paying his respects.

Observers reported that coverage in the English-language media of issues facing religious minorities continued, but that journalists faced threats for covering these issues. Following the government’s reversal of the appointment of prominent Ahmadi economist Atif Mian to the Prime Minister’s Council of Economic Advisers, English-language outlets such as the Daily Times and Dawn published editorials highly critical of the government’s “caving to extremists.”

Observers reported that Urdu-language media continued to show bias in reporting on minority religious groups, including multiple instances in which media censored references to Ahmadis on talk shows, used inflammatory language, or made inappropriate references to minorities. According to Ahmadiyya community reports, in February Geo TV aired an interview in which a politician praised former Foreign Minister Zafrullah Khan, an Ahmadi. When the interview aired again the next day, the portion discussing Zafrullah Khan was cut.

Human rights and religious freedom activists and members of minority religious groups reported they continued to be cautious when speaking in favor of religious tolerance because of the societal climate of intolerance and fear. Some activists reported receiving death threats because of their work.

There continued to be reports of attacks on religious minorities’ holy places, cemeteries, and religious symbols. In addition to the attacks on Ahmadi places of worship in Sialkot in May and in Faisalabad in August, NGOs reported attacks by angry crowds on churches in Burewala and Yousafwala, Punjab, in March, as well as in Kasur, Punjab, on August 2.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

The Ambassador, Charge d’Affaires, consuls general, embassy officers, and visiting senior U.S. officials met with government officials and senior advisors to the prime minister, including the minister for human rights, and officials from the Ministry of Law and Justice, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Ministry of Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony to discuss blasphemy law reform; the need to better protect members of religious minority communities; interfaith dialogue; sectarian relations; and respect between religions.

The U.S. government sponsored training programs for some provincial police officers on human rights and protecting minorities, and worked to expand the curriculum in Sindh and Balochistan to include modules on these issues. In order to better address rape cases involving vulnerable women, one Inspector General of Police authorized U.S. government-trained Pakistani policewomen and medical-legal staff to conduct women’s self-defense training in the community, with the broader goal of strengthening relationships to address the culturally sensitive topic.

In May the U.S. Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom expressed concern about the country’s blasphemy laws and individuals serving life sentences or facing death under these laws in his public remarks during the release of the 2017 International Religious Freedom Report. In September the Ambassador at Large again raised concerns about the application of blasphemy laws, as well as the country’s anti-Ahmadi laws and sectarian violence, with Foreign Secretary Tehmina Janjua.

In May the Department of State Special Advisor for Religious Minorities visited Islamabad and Lahore and met with religious minority community representatives, parliamentarians, members of the federal cabinet, and human rights attorneys. The Special Advisor highlighted concerns over attacks by violent extremists against members of religious minorities, the enforcement of blasphemy laws, and discrimination against Ahmadi Muslims.

In December the Charge d’Affaires toured Faisal Mosque in Islamabad to show respect to Islam and demonstrate interfaith engagement. The Charge d’Affaires and other embassy officers convened groups of civil society and interfaith activists to discuss the situation of religious minorities and other vulnerable communities and avenues for engagement by U.S. government representatives.

In September the Consul General in Karachi, Sindh – the country’s most religiously diverse province – hosted a round table discussion with members of religious minorities, including Christians, Hindus, and Sikhs, to discuss the rights of religious minorities and the potential for greater interfaith dialogue.

Embassy officers met with civil society leaders, experts, and journalists to stress the need to protect the rights of religious minorities and continue to support measures that decrease sectarian violence. They also met with other embassies, leaders of religious

communities, NGOs, and legal experts working on religious freedom issues to discuss ways to increase respect between religions and dialogue. U.S. Department of State programs helped to promote peacebuilding among religious and community leaders.

The Department of State publicly condemned terrorist attacks throughout the year, including the November attack near a Shia place of worship in Orakzai District, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

On November 28, the Secretary of State designated 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 announced a waiver of the sanctions that accompany designation as required in the important national interests of the United States.

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