

PAKISTAN 2012 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution and other laws and policies officially restrict religious freedom and, in practice, the government enforced many of these restrictions. The government's respect for and protection of the right to religious freedom continued to be poor. The government's limited capacity and will to investigate or prosecute the perpetrators of increasing extremist attacks against religious minorities and on members of the Muslim majority promoting tolerance, allowed the climate of impunity to continue. The constitution establishes Islam as the state religion, and it 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." Some government practices, however, limited freedom of religion, particularly for religious minorities. Freedom of speech is constitutionally "subject to any reasonable restrictions imposed by law in the interest of the glory of Islam." Abuses under the blasphemy law and other discriminatory laws continued; the government did not take adequate measures to prevent these incidents or reform the laws to prevent abuse. On August 17, police detained on blasphemy charges Rimsha Masih, a Christian girl who reportedly suffered from a mental disability, after a local Muslim cleric alleged that he observed the girl desecrate pages of the Quran. There were instances in which law enforcement personnel reportedly abused religious minorities in custody. At least 17 people are awaiting execution for blasphemy and 20 others are serving life sentences, although to date the government has never carried out an execution for blasphemy.

There were reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. During the year, societal intolerance continued while there were increasing attacks against members of the Shia Muslim community. Human rights and religious freedom advocates and members of minorities reported self-censorship due to a climate of intolerance and fear. Acts of violence and intimidation against religious minorities by violent extremists exacerbated existing sectarian tensions. Violent extremists in some parts of the country demanded that all citizens follow their authoritarian interpretation of Islam and threatened brutal consequences if they did not abide by it.

Violent extremists also targeted Muslims who advocated tolerance and pluralism. There were scores of attacks on Sufi, Hindu, Ahmadiyya Muslim, Shia, and Christian gatherings and religious sites, resulting in numerous deaths and extensive

PAKISTAN

damage. Some religious groups protested against public debate about potential amendments to the blasphemy laws or against alleged acts of blasphemy.

During the year, the U.S. government closely monitored the treatment of religious minorities. Embassy and other U.S. government officials met with senior Pakistani officials to discuss religious freedom and minority issues, and encouraged the government to address concerns. The embassy and consulates held events honoring minority leaders and supporters of religious freedom. Among the events the embassy sponsored was a May interfaith women's dialogue that took place at the Eidgah Sharif Sufi Shrine in Rawalpindi. Diplomatic staff including the ambassador and consuls general visited several prominent Sufi shrines throughout the country and participated in interfaith events sponsored by the government. Diplomatic staff reached out to leaders of all religious groups to emphasize the importance of religious freedom and harmony.

Section I. Religious Demography

According to 2012 U.S. government data, the total population is approximately 190.3 million. According to the most recent census, conducted in 1998, 95 percent of the population is Muslim (75 percent of the Muslim population is Sunni and 25 percent Shia). Groups constituting 5 percent of the population or less include Hindus, Christians, Parsis/Zoroastrians, Bahais, Sikhs, Buddhists, and others. While Ahmadi Muslims consider themselves Muslim, the law prohibits them from identifying as such. Other religious groups include Kalasha, Kihals, and Jains. Less than 0.5 percent of the population is silent on religious affiliation or claims not to adhere to a particular religious group. Social pressure is such that few persons claim no religious affiliation.

Section II. Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The constitution and other laws and policies restrict religious freedom. The constitution establishes Islam as the state religion. Although it also declares that adequate provisions shall be made for minorities to profess and practice their religious beliefs freely, other provisions of the constitution and laws impose limits on this right. Government policies do not afford the same protections to members of minority religious groups as they do to the majority religious group.

PAKISTAN

A 1974 constitutional amendment declared that Ahmadis are non-Muslims. Sections 298(b) and 298(c) of the penal code, commonly referred to as the “anti-Ahmadi laws,” prohibit Ahmadi Muslims from calling themselves Muslims, referring to their religious beliefs as Islam, preaching or propagating their religious beliefs, inviting others to accept Ahmadiyya teachings, or insulting the religious feelings of Muslims. The punishment for violation of these provisions is imprisonment for up to three years and a fine. Most politicians oppose any amendments to the constitution affecting its Islamic clauses, especially the ones relating to Ahmadi Muslims.

Freedom of speech is subject to “reasonable restrictions in the interest of the glory of Islam,” as stipulated in sections 295(a), (b), and (c) of the penal code. The consequences for contravening the country’s blasphemy laws are death for “defiling Prophet Muhammad,” life imprisonment for “defiling, damaging, or desecrating the Quran,” and 10 years’ imprisonment for “insulting another’s religious feelings.” Separately, under the Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA), any action, including speech, intended to incite religious hatred is punishable by up to seven years’ imprisonment. In cases in which a minority group claims its religious feelings were insulted, the blasphemy laws are rarely enforced, and cases are rarely brought to the legal system. The law requires that a senior police official investigate any blasphemy charge before a complaint is filed.

The penal code incorporates a number of Islamic legal 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 Shariat Court and the Sharia bench of the Supreme Court serve as appellate courts for certain convictions in criminal courts under the Hudood Ordinance (an ordinance enacted in 1979 to implement Islamic law), including those for rape, extramarital sex, alcohol, and gambling. The Federal Shariat Court exercises “revisional jurisdiction” (the power to review of its own accord cases in lower courts) that applies to Muslims and non-Muslims, in cases relating to Hudood laws. Non-Muslims are allowed to consult the Federal Shariat Court in other matters that affect them or violate their rights if they so choose.

The country’s interpretation of Islamic 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.

PAKISTAN

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 Muslim movement's founder as a false prophet and his followers as non-Muslim. This provision prevents Ahmadi Muslims from obtaining legal documents and puts pressure on members of the community to deny their beliefs in order to enjoy citizenship rights, including the right to vote. Many Ahmadis are thus effectively excluded from taking part in 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. There is no official restriction on the construction of Ahmadiyya Muslim places of worship; however, Ahmadis are forbidden to call them mosques.

The government provides funding for construction and maintenance of mosques and for Islamic clergy. The provincial and federal governments have legal responsibility for certain minority religious properties that were abandoned during the 1947 partition of British India before independence. The government collects a 2.5 percent zakat (tithe) on all Sunni Muslims and distributes the funds to Sunni mosques, madrassahs, and charities. The government does not impose similar requirements on other religious groups.

The 2008 establishment of the Ministry for Minorities removed responsibility for protection of religious minorities from the Ministry of Religious Affairs. In 2011, the government dissolved the Federal Ministry for Minorities as part of the national devolution plan under the 18th Amendment to the constitution. Responsibilities are now under the purview of the provinces. In 2011, the government created the Ministry of National Harmony, a stand-alone, cabinet-level body responsible for the oversight of policy and legislation regarding interfaith harmony, international agreements relating to religious freedom and interfaith harmony, and commitments with respect to all religious communities. The budget of the ministry covers assistance to indigent minorities, the repair of minority places of worship, the establishment of minority-run small development projects, and the celebration of minority religious festivals.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs is primarily responsible for organizing participation in the Hajj and other Islamic religious pilgrimages. The federal

PAKISTAN

government, however, also consults the ministry on matters such as blasphemy and educational reforms.

The constitution safeguards “educational institutions with respect to religion.” No student can be forced to receive religious instruction or participate in religious worship in other than his or her own religion. The denial of religious instruction for students of any religious community or denomination also is 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 generally are not offered parallel studies in their own religious beliefs and by default are required to take the Islamic studies class. In some schools, non-Muslim students may study akhlaqiyyat, or ethics. Parents may send children to private religious schools, at the family’s expense, and private schools are generally free to teach or not to teach religious studies as they choose.

The constitution specifically prohibits discriminatory admission to any governmental educational institution solely based on religious affiliation. Officials have stated that 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 also is required for private educational institutions, including universities. Students who identify themselves as Muslim must declare in writing that they believe that the Prophet Muhammad is the final prophet, a measure that singles out Ahmadi Muslims. Non-Muslims are required to have their religious affiliation verified by the head of their local religious communities.

Private schools run by Islamic clerics, or madrassahs, vary greatly in their curriculum and character. In some rural communities government schools may be in poor condition or far away, making madrassahs the only form of education available to poor students. By law, madrassahs are prohibited from teaching sectarian or religious hatred or encouraging sectarian or religious violence. In practice, however, hardline clerics who preach intolerance toward other sects are common, and in recent years, a small yet influential number of madrassahs have taught violent extremist doctrine in support of terrorism in violation of the law. 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) or directly with the government, cease accepting foreign financing, and accept foreign students only with the consent of their governments. According to the Ministry of Religious Affairs, as of December 31, 2010, 19,421

PAKISTAN

madrassahs had been registered. However, many civil society organizations and education experts disputed the number of madrassahs operating across the country. According to the Ittehad Tanzeem ul Madaris Pakistan (IMTP), a council consisting of the heads of the five major wafaqs, there are approximately 25,000-30,000 registered madrassahs.

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

The government does not prohibit, restrict, or punish parents for raising children in accordance with religious teachings and practices of their choice and does not prohibit religious instruction in the home.

There is no legal requirement for individuals 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, both Muslims and non-Muslims, are not prohibited from displaying or practicing any elements of their religious beliefs.

Missionaries (except Ahmadi Muslims) are permitted and can proselytize as long as there is no preaching against Islam and the missionaries acknowledge that 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 are available, and long delays and bureaucratic problems are common.

In accordance with the ATA, the government bans the activities of and membership in several groups it judges to be "extremist" or terrorist. The act allows the government to use special streamlined courts to try cases involving violent crimes, terrorist activities, acts, or speech designed to foment religious hatred (including blasphemy cases), and crimes against the state; however, many banned groups remain active, and some others avoid the law by changing their names once banned.

The government does not recognize either civil or common law marriage. Marriages generally are performed and registered according to one's religious group; however, there is no legal mechanism for the government to register marriages of Hindus and Sikhs. The marriages of non-Muslim men remain legal

PAKISTAN

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. The only way to legitimize the marriage and render the children legitimate and 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.

There are reserved seats for religious minority members in both the national and provincial assemblies. The seats are allocated to political parties on a proportional basis determined by their overall representation in the assembly. The 342-seat national assembly has 13 members of minority religious groups, 10 of whom held reserved seats for minorities and three of whom held reserved seats for women. As part of the 18th Amendment, the 104-seat senate has four reserved seats for religious minorities, one from each province. Reserved seats for religious minorities also exist in the provincial assemblies: three in Khyber Pakhunkhwa (KP), eight in Punjab, nine in Sindh, and three in Balochistan. Minorities are represented in the local government system with a minimum of one seat per zila, tehsil (a zila is equivalent to a district and a tehsil is an administrative unit within a zila), or union council, as stipulated under the provincial Local Government Ordinances. In Balochistan Province, religious minority representation is based on population, with a minimum of two seats per zila.

In May President Zardari signed the National Commission for Human Rights Bill authorizing the establishment of an independent human rights commission. According to the bill, the commission is to consist of 10 members and to be headed either by a retired judge of the Supreme Court or by a human rights expert. There are to be reserved seats--one for a woman and another for a person belonging to a religious minority. The commission would have the authority to hold any institution accountable for its human rights violations.

The government observes all Islamic holy days as national holidays.

Government Practices

There were reports of abuses of religious freedom, including religious prisoners and detainees. The government generally enforced existing legal and policy restrictions on religious freedom, particularly on Ahmadi Muslims. Government policies did not afford equal protection to members of majority and minority

PAKISTAN

religious groups, and due to discriminatory legislation, minorities often were afraid to profess freely their religious beliefs.

During the year, media and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) reported on allegations of killings by authorities. For example, media reported that on March 30, Ahmadi schoolteacher Abdul Quddoos was tortured in police custody in Chenab Nagar, Punjab and later died in a local hospital due to injuries. Police reportedly detained him as the suspect in a murder but released him after allegedly torturing him. Ahmadiyya community leaders said that the real reason for the teacher's arrest was to undermine the reputation of the local Ahmadiyya administration of Chenab Nagar.

Police reportedly tortured and abused persons in custody on religious charges. According to the local NGO Center for Legal Aid Assistance and Settlement (CLAAS), in October, guards at the Central Jail in Mianwali allegedly tortured Younis Masih, who has been imprisoned since his 2005 death sentence for blasphemy. Masih claimed that prison authorities beat him, deprived him of proper food and medical attention, and subsequently charged him with inciting a riot in the prison. Masih's appeal of his death sentence remained pending at year's end.

Abuses under the blasphemy and other discriminatory laws, such as "the anti-Ahmadi laws," continued. The government did not take adequate measures to prevent these incidents or undertake reform measures to prevent the widespread abuse of the laws. At least 17 people were awaiting execution for blasphemy and 20 others were serving life sentences. However, as of year's end, the government had never carried out an execution for blasphemy.

On February 1, a district court in Punjab upheld the death sentence of Sufi Muhammed Ishaq for blasphemy. Ishaq, a longtime U.S. resident who returned to Pakistan to care for a Sufi shrine, was initially convicted by a court in Talagang in July 2009 after a video surfaced of Sufi devotees touching his feet, a common sign of respect. His accusers alleged that Ishaq had claimed to be a messenger from God. NGOs countered that the charges actually stemmed from a property dispute involving a Sufi shrine.

On November 14, a court in Chitral sentenced Hazrat Ali Shah, a 25-year-old Muslim from Barenis Village, to death for blasphemy. Shah was arrested in March 2011 for allegedly making sacrilegious remarks against the Prophet Mohammed

PAKISTAN

during a physical altercation. In addition to the death sentence, Shah was fined and given a “rigorous” 10-year prison sentence.

Authorities continued to use the blasphemy laws against Muslims, Christians, Ahmadiyya Muslims, and members of other groups. NGOs alleged that individuals frequently brought charges under these laws to settle personal grievances or to intimidate vulnerable individuals. Lower courts often did not adhere to basic evidentiary standards in blasphemy cases, which led to some accused and convicted persons spending years in jail before higher courts eventually overturned their convictions and ordered them freed. Trial courts usually denied bail in blasphemy cases, claiming that because defendants could face the death penalty, they were likely to flee. Judges and magistrates, seeking to avoid confrontation with or violence from extremists, often continued trials indefinitely. Lower courts conducted proceedings in an atmosphere of intimidation by violent extremists and refused bail due to fear of reprisal. While the law requires that a senior police official investigate any blasphemy charge before a complaint is filed, this was not uniformly enforced.

According to data provided by the National Commission for Justice and Peace (NCJP), between January and November, a total of 30 cases were registered under the blasphemy laws. Of these, 11 were against Christians, five against Ahmadis, and 14 against Muslims. The NCJP reported that authorities registered a total of 1,170 blasphemy cases between 1987 and 2012. According to Human Rights Watch, during 2012 dozens of people were charged with blasphemy and at least 17 people remained on death row for blasphemy, while another 20 served life sentences.

On May 17, the Lahore High Court overturned the blasphemy convictions of Munir Masih and Ruqqiya Bibi. In 2010, the district court in Kasur had sentenced the Christian couple to 25 years in prison for defiling a Quran after touching it with unwashed hands.

On August 17, police detained on blasphemy charges Rimsha Masih, a Christian girl who reportedly suffered from a mental disability, after a local Muslim cleric alleged that he observed the girl desecrate pages of the Quran. In the wake of the arrest, several hundred Christian families fled their homes fearing violence. The cleric was subsequently arrested on allegations that he placed the burnt pages of the Quran out for Masih to pick up; he remained in jail facing blasphemy charges at year's end. Masih was released on bail in early September, and the Islamabad High Court dismissed her case on November 20.

PAKISTAN

Non-Muslim prisoners generally were accorded poorer facilities than Muslim inmates. According to an October 2011 study by the NGO Life for All, prisoners accused of violating the blasphemy laws often were treated differently than those accused of other crimes. Many of them were kept in solitary confinement due to threats from other inmates and, in some instances, prison guards.

On March 2, the Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) claimed that Faisalabad district jail superintendent Tariq Mehmood Khan burned two imambargahs (Shia holy places) and a church on the jail premises. The AHRC urged the government to immediately suspend and prosecute the superintendent, who was said to have links to a banned religious organization. Later, the government formed a six-member committee composed of district officials and religious leaders to probe the allegations, although they had taken no significant action on the case by year's end.

Ahmadi Muslim leaders expressed continued concern over the government's use of the penal code to harass and intimidate Ahmadis on the basis of their faith. They alleged that the government used the "anti-Ahmadi laws" to target and harass Ahmadis, frequently accusing converts to the Ahmadiyya Muslim community of blasphemy, violations of "anti-Ahmadi laws," or other crimes. The vague wording of the provision that forbids Ahmadis from directly or indirectly identifying themselves as Muslims enabled officials to bring charges against Ahmadi Muslims for using the standard Muslim greeting and for naming their children Muhammad. According to Ahmadiyya leaders, between January and December, authorities charged 56 Ahmadis in 20 different cases. Most of these cases were filed in connection with "anti-Ahmadi laws." At year's end, no Ahmadis were in prison; however, during the year 26 Ahmadis were arrested for their faith and spent time in prison before being released on bail.

The constitution provides for the right to establish places of worship and train clergy, but in practice the government restricted this right for religious minorities, especially Ahmadi Muslims. District-level authorities consistently refused to grant permission to construct non-Muslim places of worship, especially for the Ahmadiyya and Bahai communities, citing the need to maintain public order. Minority religious groups accused the government of inaction in cases where extremist groups attacked their places of worship. Ahmadis reported that their mosques and community lands were routinely confiscated by local authorities and given to the mainstream Muslim community. Ahmadis also reported incidents in which authorities tried to block construction or renovation of their places of

PAKISTAN

worship. Because the law prohibits Ahmadi Muslims from reciting or relating to the kalima (Islamic testimony of faith), authorities forcibly removed the kalima from Ahmadi places of worship in some instances. District governments often refused to grant Ahmadi Muslims permission to hold public events; they instead held meetings in members' homes. According to Jamaat-e-Ahmadiyya-- between 1984 when the "anti-Ahmadi laws" were promulgated and 2012-- the authorities sealed 28 Ahmadi mosques and barred construction of 46 mosques, while 24 mosques were demolished, 13 mosques were set on fire, and 16 mosques were forcibly occupied in different incidents.

Hindus, Sikhs, and other religious minorities stated that the government failed to protect religious properties and did not spend adequate funds on the protection and upkeep of minority religious properties that were abandoned during the 1947 partition of British India before independence. They also claimed that the government was complicit in seizures of their property by Muslims, and that the policy of dismantling illegal slum settlements disproportionately targeted minority communities. For example, according to the Asian Center for Human Rights (ACHR), military authorities demolished a Hindu temple on December 1 in Karachi, allegedly after being bribed by a private developer seeking to confiscate the land.

Officials sometimes used bureaucratic demands and requested or took bribes to delay minority religious groups attempting to build houses of worship or obtain land. On the other hand, Sunni Muslim groups sometimes built mosques and shrines without government permission, at times in violation of zoning ordinances and on government-owned lands, without repercussions.

The government monitored the activities of various Islamist parties and affiliated clergy due to alleged links to terrorist organizations.

Although the constitution provides for freedom of assembly, Ahmadi Muslims have been prohibited from holding conferences or gatherings since 1983. They are also banned from preaching. The government has banned Ahmadiyya publications from public sale, but the umbrella Ahmadiyya organization published religious literature that circulated only within Ahmadi communities. On August 22, the English-language daily *Dawn* reported that Ahmadis were restricted from offering Eid prayers at an Ahmadiyya mosque in Rawalpindi. The newspaper quoted a community spokesman as saying that nine months before, a hate campaign against the community enticed residents of the area to restrict their activities.

PAKISTAN

Foreign books must pass government censors before being reprinted. Books and magazines were imported freely but were subject to censorship for sexual or religious content considered objectionable. Generally, sacred books for religious minorities, except Ahmadi Muslims, were imported freely. Hindus also faced some difficulty in importing books from India.

The government 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 Ahmadiyya Muslim prophet, Ahmadi Muslims were restricted from going on the Hajj because they were prohibited from declaring themselves Muslims. Because the government does not recognize Israel, religious believers regardless of religious affiliation were unable to travel to Israel. This especially affected Bahais, since the Bahai World Center--the spiritual and administrative heart of the community--is located in northern Israel.

Discrimination against Hindus, Sikhs, and Ahmadis in admission to higher education institutions persisted. Sikh leaders reported they faced restrictions in securing admissions into colleges and universities, as they were required to obtain a certificate of permission from the Evacuee Trust Property Board, which they said was a lengthy process that discouraged Sikhs from pursuing higher education. There were no reports of discrimination against Christians when they applied for entry to universities and medical schools.

Most religious minority groups, with the exception of Shia, complained of discrimination in hiring. While there is a 5 percent quota for hiring religious minorities at the federal and provincial levels, it had not been fully implemented by year's end.

Promotions for all minority groups appeared limited within the civil service. These problems were particularly acute for Ahmadi Muslims, who contended that a "glass ceiling" prevented their promotion to senior positions, and certain government departments refused to hire or retain qualified Ahmadi Muslims. The government discriminated against some groups, such as Ahl-e-Hadith, a Sunni Muslim reformist movement to which 4 percent of the country's Muslims adhere, in hiring clergy for government mosques and military and faculty members for Islamic studies positions in 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

PAKISTAN

to politically sensitive positions. A chaplaincy corps provided services for Muslim soldiers, but no similar services were available for religious minorities.

According to reports from the Jinnah Institute and other organizations, public school curricula included derogatory statements in textbooks about minority religious groups, particularly Ahmadi Muslims, Hindus, and Jews, and the teaching of religious intolerance was widespread. Some provinces continued efforts to revise curricula to eliminate such teachings.

The Hindu and Sikh communities, as well as the Scheduled Caste Rights Movement, continued to demand official registration of their marriages. The minorities' representatives asserted that in the absence of Hindu and Sikh marriage registration, women faced difficulties inheriting their parents' and husbands' property, accessing health services, voting, obtaining a passport, and buying or selling property.

Government Inaction

The government's general failure to investigate, arrest, or prosecute those responsible for societal abuses promoted an environment of impunity leading to increasing vigilantism and mob violence. Human rights organizations continued to allege that the 2011 killings of then Punjab Governor Salman Taseer and Federal Minister for Minorities Shahbaz Bhatti, both of whom spoke against blasphemy laws, stemmed from a lack of rule of law and a failure of the government to provide adequate protection for officials known to be targets of extremists.

Leading domestic and international human rights organizations stated that blasphemy laws and the government's failure or delay in addressing religious hostility by societal actors fostered intolerance, acts of violence and intimidation, and a sense of impunity.

In numerous cases during the year, authorities stood by and failed to intervene to protect victims of religiously motivated mob violence. For example, on April 16 in Sheikhpura, Punjab, media reported that 80-year-old Iqbal Butt, who had been acquitted of blasphemy in December 2011, was shot and killed by blasphemy complainant Maulvi Waqas. According to Butt's family, Waqas accused the victim of blasphemy in order to settle a personal dispute and was able to pressure the police through the complaints of clerics to register a case against him. Authorities later initiated a case against Waqas.

PAKISTAN

On July 5, local and international media reported that a mob attacked the Channigoth police station in Bahawalpur, Punjab on July 3, where a mentally ill man was detained for allegedly desecrating the Quran. The mob set the police station on fire, beat the accused man, dragged him to an open area and set him on fire, killing him.

During the year, there were scores of killings of members of minority religious groups, particularly Shia Muslims and Ahmadi Muslims. Few of these killings led to arrest or convictions of the perpetrators.

There were increasing attacks and killings of members of the Shia Muslim community, which authorities failed to prevent or punish. According to the South Asia Terrorism Portal, 507 people were killed in sectarian violence across the country during the year. On April 3, for example, unknown perpetrators killed 20 and injured 55 others in an apparent sectarian attack in Gilgit city. On October 19 in Lahore, armed men on motorcycles killed Shakir Ali Rizvi, an attorney and local Shia leader.

According to the Ahmadiyya community, since the promulgation of “anti-Ahmadi laws” in 1984, 226 Ahmadis have been killed on religious grounds. During the year, 20 Ahmadis were killed because of their faith, a significant increase over the previous year. Authorities made no arrests in any of these cases by year’s end. For example, in February an 80-year-old Ahmadi man was shot and killed by two motorcyclists, reportedly motivated by anti-Ahmadiyya sentiments. No arrests have been made.

Religious minorities claimed that government actions addressing forced and coerced conversions of religious minorities to Islam by societal actors were inadequate. According to the NGOs Human Rights Commission of Pakistan and the Pakistan Hindu Council, as many as 20 to 25 women and girls from the Hindu community were abducted every month and forced to convert to Islam.

According to media reports, on September 24 in Nishatabad, Faisalabad, Punjab, a Muslim man named Javed Iqbal forcibly abducted Shumaila Bibi, a 24-year-old Christian woman, married her and converted her to Islam. Bibi, who worked in a textile company, reportedly managed to escape and returned to her parents’ house. Iqbal pursued kidnapping charges against Bibi’s parents and claimed she had freely converted and consented to the marriage. Both parties filed counter complaints and the case was pending at year’s end.

PAKISTAN

Minority community leaders charged that the government failed to take adequate action to protect minorities from bonded labor in the brick-making and agricultural sectors, and that Christians and Hindus were disproportionately victims of this illegal practice.

There were numerous reports of attacks by societal actors on holy places, cemeteries, and symbols of religious minorities. For example, on December 6, unidentified men desecrated approximately 100 Ahmadi Muslim graves at a cemetery in Lahore. No arrests have been made.

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, including Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan.

Attacks on houses of worship, religious gatherings, and religious leaders perpetrated by sectarian, violent extremist, and terrorist groups resulted in hundreds of deaths during the year.

Sectarian violence increased during the year. According to the South Asia Terrorism Portal, 507 people were killed in such violence between January and December. On February 28, for example, unidentified gunmen forced 18 Shia passengers to disembark from four Gilgit-bound passenger buses and shot them to death. On August 16, over a dozen gunmen forced 19 Shia passengers off four Gilgit-bound buses and killed them in the Mansehra district.

Attacks against ethnic Hazara Shias in Balochistan similarly increased during the year. On June 28, at least 13 people were killed and over 20 others injured in a bomb attack on a bus carrying Shia pilgrims returning from Iran near Hazarganji, Balochistan. Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, a local violent extremist group, claimed responsibility for the attack in which most of the victims were Hazaras. In another incident on July 7, at least 18 people were killed when unidentified motorcycle riders opened fire on an Iran-bound bus near Turbat in Balochistan.

Attacks on Sufi shrines continued during the year. On June 22, media reported that a bomb blast at Panj Pir shrine in Hazarkhwani on the outskirts of Peshawar killed three people and injured 31 others. An improvised explosive device was planted in

PAKISTAN

a donkey cart which was parked outside the shrine, according to an official. In another incident, a bomb attack on the shrine of Sufi saint Hazrat Kaka Saheb in Nowshera, KP on the second day of Eid ul Azha left four people dead and 32 others wounded. Although no specific entity claimed responsibility for the attacks, local press pointed to local militant group Lashkar-e-Islam as the likely perpetrator.

Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

There were reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Citizens frequently used blasphemy laws to harass religious minorities and vulnerable Muslims and to settle personal scores or business rivalries. Societal elements also used “anti-Ahmadi” provisions of the penal code to justify abuse and discrimination of Ahmadi Muslims. Human rights and religious freedom activists and members of minorities reported that they were at times hesitant to speak in favor of religious tolerance due to a climate of intolerance and fear.

Relations among religious communities remained tense. Violence against religious minorities and between Muslim sects continued. While a small number of persons were involved in violent attacks, discriminatory laws and lack of reform of these laws, the teaching of religious intolerance, and the lack of police protection of minorities and prosecution of perpetrators created a permissive environment for such attacks.

Persons accused of blasphemy continued to be killed during the year. For example, on December 22, a mob in Dadu stormed a police station and abducted a mentally ill man who had earlier that day been arrested on suspicion of blasphemy for allegedly burning a Quran. The mob then set the man on fire and he burned to death.

On January 4, 2011 Punjab Governor Salman Taseer was killed by his bodyguard for publicly criticizing the blasphemy laws and calling for reforms. On October 1, 2011 the Rawalpindi Anti-Terrorism Court sentenced Taseer’s killer, Malik Mumtaz Qadri, to death. The judge who handed down Qadri’s verdict received threats, had his offices ransacked, and fled the country. Qadri filed an appeal of the sentence on October 6, 2011. The appeal remained pending in the Islamabad High Court at year’s end.

PAKISTAN

Sectarian violence between violent Sunni and Shia extremists continued, and several religious minority individuals and communities were the targets of religiously motivated violence across the country. Attacks on the Shia minority, particularly in Dera Ismail Khan, Quetta, Hangu, Kohat, Tank, DG Khan, Gilgit, and in Kurram and Orakzai Agencies continued.

Conversion to minority religious beliefs generally took place in secret to avoid societal backlash. Forced and coerced conversions of religious minorities to Islam occurred at the hands of societal actors.

Media, particularly the vernacular press, published derogatory reports on minorities, especially Ahmadi Muslims.

There were instances when informally organized groups seized minority places of worship using threats, intimidation, and other unlawful means to force the religious communities to abandon their properties or force a sale by the government.

On September 21, a mob protesting against an anti-Islam internet video attacked a church in Mardan, KP. The mob broke through the main gate of the compound, attacked and set fire to St. Paul's Church, St. Paul's High School, the library, a computer laboratory, and the houses of four clergymen. The mob desecrated the altar, tore copies of the Bible and prayer books and later lit the premises on fire. President Asif Ali Zardari condemned the attack and police launched an investigation.

Also on September 21, a mob of 150 people carrying rocks and sticks attacked a Hindu temple devoted to Shri Krishana Bhagwan in Gulshan-e-Maymar, Karachi. The mob vandalized the temple, smashed religious statues, and damaged holy books. On September 30, media reported that prosecutors were pursuing a case against the perpetrators under Section 295(a) of the blasphemy laws, which covers the "outraging of religious feelings." Civil society groups noted that this was a rare instance in which the country's blasphemy laws were invoked on behalf of a minority faith.

Ahmadi Muslims and Ahmadiyya Muslim institutions were victims of religious violence, much of it organized by violent extremists.

Ahmadi leaders accused the vernacular press of publishing anti-Ahmadi statements. According to Jamaate-e-Ahmadiyya, between January and December,

PAKISTAN

1,044 news reports and 255 articles specifically discriminating against Ahmadi Muslims were published in major Urdu dailies in Lahore.

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

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

Discrimination against Christians in employment was 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.

All wafaqs continued to mandate the elimination of teaching that promoted religious or sectarian intolerance and terrorist or extremist recruitment at madrassahs. Inspectors from the education boards mandated that affiliated madrassahs with full-time students supplement religious studies with secular subjects.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

U.S. embassy and consulate officers maintained a dialogue with government, parliament, and civil society, including religious and minority community representatives, to encourage religious freedom and tolerance, and to discuss specific issues of concern. These included blasphemy laws; curriculum reform in public education and madrassah education systems; treatment of the Ahmadiyya Muslim, Christian, Hindu, Sikh, and other minority communities; and sectarian violence, as well as ways to improve the regular protection of and outreach to minority groups. Embassy officials raised with parliamentarians and other government officials the treatment of religious minorities and blasphemy laws. Embassy and consulate officials met regularly with ministers and other high-ranking officials to discuss government plans to promote religious freedom and interfaith harmony.

Embassy officials, including the ambassador, consuls general and visiting Department of State officials, attended and hosted meetings with government officials, as well as leaders from communities of all religious groups and NGOs

PAKISTAN

working on religious freedom issues. Issues of interfaith dialogue, religious tolerance, and religious freedom were discussed in these meetings. Embassy officials also explored with these groups the development of programs and projects to promote religious tolerance.

Embassy officers investigated and monitored human rights cases involving religious minorities and continued their dialogue with the government, urging a swift and effective response to these incidents.

The U.S. embassy and consulates participated in several interfaith events that were reported widely in the media, including visits to numerous shrines and participation in interfaith conferences hosted by the government.