



Refugee Documentation Centre (Ireland)
LEGAL AID BOARD

Bangladesh: Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on 12 January 2010

Please advise of treatment of Ahmadi Muslims in Bangladesh.

The annual *US Department of State* report on religious freedoms in Bangladesh states:

“Although the Government publicly supported freedom of religion, attacks on religious and ethnic minorities continued to be a problem during the reporting period. There were no reported demonstrations or attempts to attack institutions of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, but there were isolated instances of harassment. Demands that Ahmadis be declared non-Muslims continued sporadically, but the Government generally acted in an effective manner to protect Ahmadis and their property.” (US Department of State (26 October 2009) *International Religious Freedom Report 2009 - Bangladesh*)

The report goes on to say

“There were approximately 100,000 Ahmadis concentrated in Dhaka and several other locales. Although mainstream Muslims rejected some of the Ahmadiyya teachings, most of them supported Ahmadis' right to practice without fear or persecution. As compared to the previous reporting period, harassment of Ahmadis by those who denounced their teachings declined.

Prothom Alo reported that on July 27, 2008, the Muslim religious extremist group Amra Dhakabashi resumed its campaign to declare the Ahmadiyya non-Muslim. The organization filed civil cases against the religious leaders of the Ahmadiyya in all 64 districts and launched a cell phone text message-based defamation campaign against Ahmadiyya leadership. By the end of the reporting period, these campaigns had been unsuccessful in provoking a widespread backlash against the Ahmadiyya community.” (Ibid)

A report from *Freedom House* states:

“Islam is the official religion, but about 10 percent of the population is Hindu, and there are smaller numbers of Buddhists and Christians. Although religious minorities have the right to worship freely, they face societal discrimination and remain underrepresented in politics and state employment. In recent years, minorities have experienced an increase in both general intolerance and attacks. As documented by Human Rights Watch and others, the 100,000-strong Ahmadiyya sect, which is considered heretical by some mainstream Muslims, has faced greater hostility in the last several years, including physical attacks and boycotts. Anti-Ahmadiyya extremist groups have demanded that the state declare Ahmadis to be non-Muslims, but the government has not bowed to such

pressures and generally acts effectively to protect Ahmadis and their property. Since the January 2007 emergency declaration, anti-Ahmadiyya demonstrations have largely ceased, although other forms of harassment and discrimination have continued, according to the U.S. State Department's 2008 International Religious Freedom Report." (Freedom House (16 July 2009) Freedom in the World 2009 - Bangladesh)

A 2008 report from the *United States Commission on International Religious Freedom* states:

"Islamist extremists in Bangladesh have also engaged in a public campaign against the Ahmadi community, which is viewed as heretical by many Muslims. The Ahmadis, also referred to as Ahmadiyya, are estimated to number about 100,000 in a population of 150 million. Anti-Ahmadi demonstrators have called on the government of Bangladesh to declare Ahmadis to be "non-Muslims," as was done in Pakistan, and subsequently used in Pakistan to justify a range of legal limitations on the Ahmadi community and individual Ahmadis. The demonstrators have also called for curbs on Ahmadi missionary activity to the broader Muslim community. Although Bangladesh has thus far refused to declare Ahmadis to be non-Muslims, in January 2004, the then BNP-led government bent to militant pressure and banned the publication and distribution of Ahmadi religious literature. Police seized Ahmadi publications on a few occasions. The ban was stayed by the courts in December 2004, with further legal action still pending. Although the ban is not currently being enforced, it was not withdrawn by the BNP-led government before leaving office in October 2006, or by the subsequent caretaker government.

Anti-Ahmadi activists object to Ahmadi houses of worship being called "mosques" and on a number of occasions have organized mass demonstrations in order to occupy or attempt to occupy the sites. In several instances, anti-Ahmadi activists have forcibly replaced signs identifying Ahmadi places of worship as mosques, putting in their place anti-Ahmadi signs warning Muslims away, sometimes with the assistance of the police. In some instances, the anti-Ahmadi agitation has also been accompanied by mob violence in which Ahmadi homes have been destroyed and Ahmadis held against their will and pressured to recant. Although the campaign against the Ahmadis has continued, the violence has diminished due to improved and more vigorous police protection. In February 2007, Ahmadis in Brahmanbaria were able to hold a major convention, which they had been unable to do for over a decade because of hostility from anti-Ahmadi militants." (United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (1 May 2008) *USCIRF Annual Report 2008 - Bangladesh*)

A 2007 report from Minority Rights Group:

"Bangladesh is the world's third most populous Muslim nation and 2006 saw a growing campaign against religious minorities. The Ahmadiyya community, a revivalist movement within Islam originating in the Punjab in India and rejected by most mainstream Muslim sects, has continued to suffer in 2006. In June, 22

Ahmadi families living in Dhaka were publicly threatened with death by members of the Islamist group International Khatme Nabuwat, an organization dedicated to safeguarding the sanctity of the finality of the Prophet Mohammed. According to Amnesty International, by targeting the Ahmadiyya community Khatme Nabuwat is attempting to force the government to yield to their political demands for the introduction of more stringent Islamic law. They also hope to obtain mass support from poor and disenfranchised sections of society, whom they feel they could influence by appealing to their religious beliefs.” (Minority Rights Group International (4 March 2007) State of the World's Minorities 2007 - Bangladesh)

References

Freedom House (16 July 2009) *Freedom in the World 2009 - Bangladesh*
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This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

Sources Consulted:

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Refugee Documentation Centre Query Database
UNHCR Refworld
US Department of State