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Responses to Information Requests

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Pakistan: The treatment of Shias, specifically in Multan and Lahore; government response to violence against Shias (2006 - November 2008)

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Islam is the state religion of Pakistan with Sunni Muslims forming the majority of the population (*Europa 2008* 2008, 3498; [US 19 Sept. 2008](#)). According to the United States (US) Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report 2008*, the Shia minority is roughly 10 to 20 percent of the population ([US 19 Sept. 2008](#), Sec. 1; see also *ibid.* 6 Nov. 2008). *The Europa World Yearbook 2008* indicates that estimates of the Shia population range from 5 to 20 percent of the total population (2008, 3498).

The treatment of Shias

According to the US Department of State's *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2007*, Shia Muslims in Pakistan "faced discrimination and societal violence" ([US 11 Mar. 2008](#), Sec. 5), as well as "significant discrimination in employment and access to education, including at government institutions" (*ibid.*, Sec. 2.c; *ibid.* 19 Sept. 2008, Sec. 2). *Country Reports 2007* further states that Shia Muslims "were the targets of religious violence" (*ibid.* 11 Mar. 2008, Sec. 2.c). The *International Religious Freedom Report 2008* indicates that some Sunni Muslim groups have published literature calling for violence against Shia Muslims ([US 19 Sept. 2008](#), Sec. 3). Freedom House states that Shia Muslims (along with Christians and Ahmadis) are targeted by extremist groups in Pakistan (2008). Both Freedom House and *Country Reports 2007* indicate that Shias and Sunnis engaged in sectarian violence against one another in 2007 (Freedom House 2008; [US 11 Mar. 2008](#), Sec. 2c).

According to a 29 October 2008 article from the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), three members of the Shia community were killed in a sectarian attack in the north-western town of Dera Ismail Khan. The *International Religious Freedom Report 2008* notes that on 27 January 2008 in Peshawar, a suicide bombing occurred at a Shia mosque killing twelve persons ([US 19 Sept. 2008](#), Sec. 2). Both the Associated Press (AP) and Agence France-Presse (AFP) report that, on 17 January 2008, a suicide bomber targeted a Shia mosque in Peshawar killing several people and injuring twenty ([AP 17 Jan. 2008](#); [AFP 18 Jan. 2008](#); see also [US 19 Sept. 2008](#), Sec. 2). The *International Religious Freedom Report 2008* indicates that on 5 December 2007, Shia religious leaders in Kohat received letters containing threats of attack should they fail to cease operations and leave Kohat, or in some cases, convert to Sunni Islam ([US 19 Sept. 2008](#), Sec. 3). According to *Country Reports 2007*, in September 2006, the district president of the banned Shia group Tehreek-e-Jaferia Pakistan (TJP) was killed ([US 11 Mar. 2008](#), Sec. 1.a). In April 2006, a Shia cleric and his driver were reportedly killed in a shooting in Faisalabad (*The Daily Times* 19 Apr. 2006; [AFP 20 Apr. 2006](#)).

The treatment of Shias in Multan and Lahore

According to a professor of politics at the Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS), "Sunni militancy against Shias was on its peak in the 1990's and early 2000's" (10 Nov. 2008). The LUMS Professor further stated that "[m]ilitancy has subsided in recent years both in Multan and Lahore" (10 Nov. 2008).

The Daily Times reports in a 14 June 2006 article that six members of the banned group Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LJ) were arrested in Multan and that the group was organizing "attacks against Shias in the area." A 6 February 2007 *Dawn* article indicates that police arrested Rizwan, an individual who allegedly killed two Shia scholars in Karachi and Lahore in 2006.

According to INTERFACE, a Pakistani agency which promotes the profession of teaching and provides teachers to a variety of educational institutions in Pakistan (INTERACE n.d.) and the *International Religious Freedom Report 2008*, students at the Punjab University (PU) in Lahore have reported that some teachers and administrative officials have been "discriminating among students on religious and political grounds" (ibid. 19 May 2008; US 19 Sept. 2008, Sec. 3). One student was reportedly denied a room in the university's hostels because he was a Shia Muslim (INTERFACE 19 May 2008; US 19 Sept. 2008, Sec. 3). An Inter Press Service News Agency (IPS) article states that Shia students at PU "were prevented from attending congregational prayers" behind Sunni prayer leaders and that Shia students would pray separately after the Sunni students had completed their prayers (27 Sept. 2008). The IPS article further indicates that, in August 2008, "six Shia students were expelled from PU hostels for insisting on joining congregational prayers" (27 Sept. 2008). According to the IPS article, the PU university administration later stated that the students will be readmitted if they relinquish their demand to pray with the congregation or with Shia prayer leaders (27 Sept. 2008). INTERFACE notes PU officials responded to student complaints by stating that PU rules provide for the equal treatment of students regardless of religious affiliation and that complaints would be investigated (19 May 2008).

Government response

The *International Religious Freedom Report 2008* indicates that the government of Pakistan signed the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* in April 2008 (US 19 Sept. 2008, Sec. 2). With respect to the government response to violence against Shias, the same report notes that government of Pakistan used negotiations and peace talks in attempts to end violence between Sunnis and Shias in the tribal areas of the country (US 19 Sept. 2008, Sec. 2). *Country Reports 2007* states that, at the end of 2007, LJ members were on trial for a February 2006 attack on Shia worshippers (US 11 Mar. 2008, Sec. 1.a). The LUMS Professor provided the following information regarding the government response to violence against Shias:

In the 80's and 90's, certain persons and institutions in the government allegedly supported anti-Shia militancy. This has not been the case for a decade now. The anti-terrorism regime in Pakistan was conceived and put into practice in the mid-90's essentially in the backdrop of Shia-Sunni conflict. The official measures in this direction have paid dividends. (10 Nov. 2008)

However, *Country Reports 2007* states that the "[p]olice often failed to protect members of religious minorities -- particularly ... Shias -- from societal attacks" (US 11 Mar. 2008, Sec. 1.d).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Attempts to reach a Pakistani human rights journalist, a lecturer at the Bahauddin Zakariya University (Multan) and officials at the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCPC) and the Human Rights Group of Pakistan (HRGP) were unsuccessful. A professor of law at the University of Warwick specializing in Pakistan and an official at the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Ottawa were unable to provide information.

Internet sites, including: Amnesty International (AI), British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), European Country of Origin Information Network (ecoi.net), Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l'homme (FIDH), Human Rights Watch (HRW), International Crisis Group, South Asia Analysis Group (SAAG), U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI).

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