

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

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Responses to Information Requests

Responses to Information Requests (RIR) respond to focused Requests for Information that are submitted to the Research Directorate in the course of the refugee protection determination process. The database contains a seven-year archive of English and French RIRs. Earlier RIRs may be found on the UNHCR's [Refworld](#) website.

25 August 2010

PAK103568.E

Pakistan: Reports of ill-treatment of members of the Zikri sect in Lahore, Islamabad and Quetta, including whether state protection is available; whether there is an affiliation between Sufism and Zikri (2008 - July 2010)
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

In 23 August 2010 correspondence with the Research Directorate, a senior representative of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) described the Zikris [also spelled Zakiris or Zakris] as an Islamic sect (HRCP 23 Aug. 2010). The sect was founded in the fifteenth century (Gregory and Valentine May 2009, 23; PakistanWeb.com n.d.). The estimated numbers of members of the Zikri sect in Pakistan varies according to sources, ranging from approximately 500,000 (Pakistanweb.com n.d.) to 800,000 people (Gregory and Valentine May 2009, 23). In a May 2009 Writenet report on Pakistan's religious minorities commissioned by the Office of the United Nations (UN) High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Status Determination and Protection Information Section, researchers Shaun R. Gregory and Simon R. Valentine also suggest that the total number of Zikris in Pakistan could be as high as "several million" (ibid.). According to Gregory and Valentine, the number of Zikris is difficult to estimate "because the Zikris usually regard themselves as Sunni Muslims when voting" (ibid.).

The Zikris are reportedly located in the province of Balochistan, notably in Makran, and in Karachi (Gregory and Valentine May 2009, 23; Pakistanweb.com n.d.). According to Gregory and Valentine, they are also found in the cities of Quetta and Gwadar, and "[t]here are also considerable numbers of Zikris living in Kallag, Pasni and the Dasht valley of Gwadar" (May 2009, 23).

The Zikis follow the teachings of Nur Pak, an Indian Sufi (Gregory and Valentine May 2009, 23), whose teaching they believe supersedes those of the Prophet Mohammed (Pakistanweb.com n.d.). The Zikris have different prayer rituals than mainstream Muslims (Gregory and Valentine May 2009, 23; IDR Apr.-June 2007). They do not perform *hajj* (the pilgrimage to Mecca); rather, once a year during Ramadan, they perform *ziyarat*, a pilgrimage to Koh-e-Murad in the city of Turbat, in Balochistan (Gregory and Valentine May 2009, 23). According to Gregory and Valentine, the Zikris are not required to turn towards Mecca during prayer and do not pray in mosques (ibid., 23-24).

Gregory and Valentine also state that the Zikris are "heavily influenced by Sufism" (ibid., 23). The HRCP Representative stated that the Zikris could be called "a kind of 'Sufis'" but did not elaborate (HRCP 23 Aug. 2010). Further information on the link between Sufism and the Zikri sect could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

Treatment

Gregory and Valentine state that the "Zikris are persecuted by mainstream Muslims for beliefs and practices regarded as deviant by Sunni Islam" (May 2009, 23). They further report that although violence is rare, Zikris have been "ostraciz[ed]" and pressured to accept Sunni Islam (ibid., 24). Pakistanweb.com reports that Zikris have faced "intermittent Sunni repression" (n.d.).

Sources report that there have been previous campaigns in Pakistan to have the Zikris declared non-Muslims (HRCP 23 Aug. 2010; Gregory and Valentine May 2009, 24). According to Gregory and Valentine, since the 1960s, several organized groups have campaigned against the Zikris (ibid.). Gregory and Valentine's 2009 report states that "[t]oday, Zikris are generally free to practise their religion", although "[t]here are clear indications that the Zikris still live in some fear" (ibid.).

The HRCP Representative stated that while the government of Pakistan has not declared the Zikris to be non-Muslims, the government has generally "failed to protect" religious minorities (HRCP 23 Aug. 2010). However, according to Gregory and Valentine, the police protected the Zikris in recent years when attempts were made to block their pilgrimage to Koh-e-Murad (May 2009, 24).

Reports of ill-treatment of members of the Zikri sect in the cities of Lahore, Islamabad and Quetta were not found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

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.

References

Gregory, Shaun R. and Simon R. Valentine. May 2009. *Pakistan: The Situation of Religious Minorities*. Commissioned by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Status Determination and Protection Information Section (Writtenet/United Nations Refworld) <<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/pdfid/4b01856e2.pdf>> [Accessed 20 Aug. 2010]

Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP). 23 August 2010. Correspondence with a Senior Representative.

Indian Defence Review (IDR). April - June 2007. Bharat Verma. "Pakistan's Fault Line." <<http://www.indiandefencereview.com/articles/archives/Pakistans-Fault-Line.html>> [Accessed 24 Aug. 2010]

Pakistanweb.com. N.d. "Balouchi." <<http://www.pakistanweb.com/html/balouchi.htm>> [Accessed 20 Aug. 2010]

Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Two academic specialists on Islam and Pakistan contacted by the Research Directorate did not have information for this Response. Attempts to contact another academic specialist and a representative of the Pakistan-based Democratic Commission for Human Development (DCHD) were unsuccessful.

Internet sources, including: Amnesty International (AI), Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), Asianews.it, Asia Times Online, *The Baloch Hal*, British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Dawn.com, Democratic Commission for Human Development (DCHD), Europa Online <<http://www.europaworld.com/>> <<http://www.courrierinternational.com/>>, European Country of Origin Information Network (ecoi.net), Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l'homme (FIDH), Forum 18, Freedom House, The Hudson Institute Center for Religious Freedom, Human Rights Watch, International Crisis Group, Jafariyaneews, Minority Rights Groups International (MRG), ReligiousTolerance.org, Shiitenews.com, Pakistan Ministry of Minorities, PakTribune, ThePersecution.org, United Kingdom (UK) Home Office, United Nations (UN) Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), UN News Service, UN Refworld, United States (US) Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), US Commission on International Religious Freedom, US Department of State.

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