



United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

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December 30, 2010

The Honorable Michael Posner
Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy,
Human Rights and Labor
Department of State
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Mr. Posner,

As Chairman of the Committee on International Justice and Peace for the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, I draw your attention to the case of Asia Bibi, a Pakistani Christian woman sentenced to death for blasphemy. In June 2010, she apparently declined to convert to Islam and instead defended her faith. She has been beaten, imprisoned, tried and sentenced to death by a Pakistani lower court and her family has been threatened. Tensions are running high as her appeal of the death sentence makes its way through the Pakistani legal system. Her case has evoked international outrage with many calling for President Asif Zardari to pardon her. Some Christian groups plan a Christmas Day march in support of Asia Bibi and the repeal of the blasphemy law. Conversely some Muslim groups are strongly defending the blasphemy laws and one imam is offering a substantial reward to whoever kills Asia Bibi.

Asia Bibi's case has highlighted the way that Pakistan's blasphemy laws are often used to justify religious intolerance and violence against minorities. A charge of blasphemy can so easily incite mob violence. According to the National Commission for Justice and Peace (NCJP) of the Pakistan Catholic Bishops' Conference, 46 people, after being charged with blasphemy, have been killed extra judicially during the 1990 to 2010 period; a disproportionate number, 28 of them, were Christian. NCJP's Executive Director Peter Jacob stated, "Christians are under fire with the instrumental use of the anti-blasphemy law," noting five new cases had been raised in two months. Pope Benedict XVI has lamented "the situation of Christians in Pakistan, who are often victims of violence or discrimination," expressed his spiritual closeness to Asia Bibi and her family, and hoped that she would "soon regain her full liberty."

Pakistan is going through difficult times given the devastating floods and the ongoing struggle against extremist elements within the country; but the protection of human rights is foundational. I ask that you convey to Pakistani government officials that to be a responsible member of the international community, Pakistan must take concrete steps to protect the human rights and religious freedom of all its citizens, including Christians such as Asia Bibi. Laws that are used in a discriminatory manner, such as the blasphemy laws, must be modified or repealed because they undermine both human rights and peace within a society.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Howard J. Hubbard".

Most Reverend Howard J. Hubbard
Bishop of Albany
Chair, Committee on International Justice
and Peace