



United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

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December 30, 2010

His Excellency Husain Haqqani
The Ambassador of Pakistan
3517 International Court NW
Washington, DC 20008

Dear Mr. Ambassador,

As Chairman of the Committee on International Justice and Peace of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, I want to express my concern over the case of Asia Bibi, a Pakistani Christian woman sentenced to death for blasphemy. International human rights groups are closely monitoring her appeal of the death sentence as it makes its way through Pakistani courts. Tensions are running high. Some Christian groups plan a Christmas Day march in support of Asia Bibi and the repeal of the blasphemy law, while some Muslim groups strongly defend the blasphemy laws. One imam is reportedly 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 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. Of those killed, a disproportionate number -- 28 people or 60 percent -- were Christian when Christians constitute less than two percent of the population.

Pakistan is going through challenging 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 Pakistan 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 Laws that are used in a discriminatory manner, such as the blasphemy laws, must be modified or repealed because they undermine both human rights and peace within a society.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,

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