

PRESS RELEASE

**FALSE DETENTION OF AHMADI CHILDREN IN DEGRADING CONDITIONS
CONTINUES**

As reported previously four Ahmadi children and one adult were arrested on blasphemy charges in District Layyah Pakistan on 28th January 2009 (FIR No 46/09). Over three months later they continue to be falsely imprisoned in conditions that are unsanitary and inhumane.

The accused, Muhammad Irfan (14), Tahir Imran (16), Tahir Mehmood (14), Naseer Ahmad (14) and Mr Mubashar Ahmed (45) are accused of writing the name of the Prophet of Islam (peace be upon him) on the walls of a toilet at a local mosque. Despite the complete lack of any incriminating evidence they continue to be detained on 'judicial remand' which has been extended a number of times by a local judge on request from the police.

Living Conditions

Although arrested in District Layyah the accused are all being held at a prison in the distant city of DG Khan. The authorities are making it extremely difficult for any of the children to be visited by members of their family and the fact that they are being held in DG Khan makes access even more problematic.

The four children accused are being detained in one cell. The only adult Mr Mubashar Ahmed is being kept in a separate cell and the children are not allowed to see him. The children are kept in the cell continuously twenty four hours a day. Due to the hot weather the cells become extremely hot but there are no fans present or any other means of cooling. Muhammad Irfan is suffering with typhoid whilst Mr Mubashar Ahmed suffers with severe asthma.

Education of children

It goes without saying that the education of the four children is gravely suffering. Muhammad Irfan has been expelled by his school on the basis of these charges without any internal investigation. The other children who were due sit their important Matriculation examinations had to prepare and indeed sit the exam whilst in prison. Their further educational and professional careers are dependent upon the results of these exams.

Lack of due process

The arrest and detention of the accused have been conducted contrary to the very laws under which they are charged. According to the rules regulating section 295-C of the Pakistani Penal Code, police officials, not less in rank than a senior superintendent, are obligated to thoroughly investigate accusations of blasphemy before presenting criminal charges. However due to the pressure of extremist Muslim groups this process was completely ignored.

Sometime after the arrests were made the senior superintendent of police (SSP) of another district, Mr Pervez Rathore, was assigned to conduct an investigation into the matter. Following investigation the SSP found that charges were completely false and that the accused ought to be immediately released. This report was sent to the relevant authorities at the end of March 2009 yet it has been conveniently ignored as a result of pressure from Mullahs.

External Reports

A number of respected organisations and individuals have highlighted the case of the Ahmadi arrested in District Layyah. The arrests have been condemned by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan; Asma Jahangir the UN Special Rapporteur and the US Commission on International Religious Freedom.

Furthermore the Asian Human Rights Commission earlier today issued an Urgent Appeal regarding the matter. Commenting upon the situation faced by the accused it states:

“They are in dangerous health conditions in the jail and their parents are not allowed to visit them according to jail policy. One, Mohammad Irfan son of Mukhtar Ahmed, 15 years of age came down with typhoid fever due to the jail's inhuman, unsanitary conditions. His health is in a precarious state with the jail

authorities not allowing him to see a doctor. The detention of the four children has been proved illegal. The senior police officer has submitted a report to the government of Punjab province that the children are innocent and charges of blasphemy as arrested, accused persons are baseless. It is reported that the government of Punjab did not want to annoy Muslim fundamentalists, who are allies of the provincial government, as they will create problems for the government.”

(Full report available at: <http://www.ahrchk.net/ua/mainfile.php/2009/3150/>)

The International Community is urged to take urgent action in an effort to secure the release of the five accused Ahmadi Muslims. The International Media is also urged to highlight the abuse of due legal process and of basic human rights that this case highlights.

End of Release

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