

Asia Bibi Arrives Safely in Canada, Reportedly 'Very Tired'

When he heard that Asia Bibi—the Pakistani Christian woman acquitted of blasphemy—was on her way to Canada, Nadeem Bhatti could hardly believe it.

"We had been told three or four times she was going to be leaving, but it never turned out," said Bhatti, a friend of the family who last spoke to Bibi three days ago.

On Tuesday (May 7), Bibi, whose death sentence was overturned late last year, left Pakistan for her new home in this country.

"She is very happy to be here, but very tired," he said after having spoken to the family. "She is very glad to be reunited with her daughters."

The daughters, both in their late teens, arrived in Canada last December while Bibi and her husband, Ashiq Masih, remained behind in Pakistan awaiting permission to leave.

Bhatti said the ordeal has taken a toll on Bibi.

"She missed her daughters so much," he said, noting she often asked "how they are doing, and feeling bad she wasn't there to help them."

Now that the family is back together, they are asking for privacy and time for everyone to rest and heal, he said.

"They need time alone," he said, adding, "they have a very good support group to help them."

The family's location in Canada is being kept secret, Bhatti

said, due to ongoing death threats. This includes a threat from an Islamist extremist in Pakistan who called on Muslims in other countries to kill her when she was allowed to leave that country.

Bhatti, who has been advocating for Bibi's release since 2011, expressed his "heartfelt thanks to the Canadian government officials who worked to bring her to Canada."

While Bibi's arrival in Canada "is an answer to prayer," he added there are "many more Christians in Pakistan and other countries whose lives are also in danger. We need to keep praying for them."

Bibi's coming to Canada brings to an end a case going back to 2009, when the young Catholic woman was accused by her Muslim neighbors of insulting the Prophet Muhammad.

She maintained her innocence but was sentenced to death in 2010. She languished in prison for eight years until fall, last year, when Pakistan's Supreme Court overturned the conviction.

After her acquittal, Bibi was set free. But death threats from radical religious hard-liners forced her and her family into hiding. In December, her daughters quietly slipped out of Pakistan and made their way to Canada.

In January, Pakistan's Supreme Court reaffirmed its decision, clearing the way for Bibi to leave. {eoa}

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