

42 Christians Told to Convert or Face 'Conviction' of Lynching Muslims

British Pakistani Christian Association has been alarmed by a report in a Pakistani newspaper highlighting attempts by the court prosecutor, to convert the 42 Christians charged with lynching two Muslim men after the Lahore Twin Church Bomb attack in March 2015.

The Express Tribune, a national daily paper, wrote that human rights activists reported that the state prosecutor told the accused Christians facing a trial in an anti-terrorism court that he "can guarantee their acquittal" if they renounce their faith and embrace Islam.

The 42 Christians were charged with lynching the two men after twin suicide blasts targeting a Sunday Mass in two churches in the Christian neighborhood of Youhanabad in Lahore on March 15, 2015. The attack resulted in 14 deaths and 75 casualties.

Christian community leaders have said that during the frenzy that ensued, local policemen delivered two men who were suspected to have been involved in the bomb attack to grieving and hysterical Christians. For some, it was a push too far, and the two Muslim men were lynched and then their bodies burned.

Over 500 Christians were arrested for the crime and tortured in prison cells. The majority were acquitted after having spent a year and six months behind bars and at least a further 30 of the men who were charged men are said to be innocent.

Even more alarming is the manner in which no Muslims were killed for their involvement in murder and rioting during the razing of the Christian village of Gojra ([click here](#)) or for

rampaging through a Christian village in 2013 ([click here](#)).

Although BPCA does not condone the killing of the two Muslim men we are surprised at the number of men convicted and the harsh death sentence, despite mitigating circumstances of heightened frenzy.

The Express Tribune reported:

“Taking advantage of their presence at ATC-1 Lahore, Deputy District Public Prosecutor Syed Anees Shah gathers the accused outside the courtroom and asks them to embrace Islam,” said Joseph Francis, a human rights activist who was involved in providing legal assistance to the accused in the case. “He asks them if they embrace Islam, he can guarantee them their acquittal in this case,” Joseph said.

The activist said they [the accused] remained silent and were dumbfounded and added that one, Irfan Masih, had spoken out and said that he was ready to be hanged if he embraced Islam.

Naseeb Anjum Advocate, counsel for some of the accused, told the Express Tribune that the public prosecutor’s offer was not new and added that he had also given this offer to some of the accused about six months back but they simply ignored it.

“They [lawyers] believe in independence of the court, but why is the DDPP blackmailing them?”

“The government should get rid of such elements that bring bad name to the state by such acts.”

Syed Anees Shah, when contacted, at first said that he did not ask them to embrace Islam, but conceded that he offered them a choice when he was told that the accused have video recording of what he said. Later, he disconnected the call in an attempt

to avoid discussing the issue reported the Tribune.

Wilson Chowdhry, Chairman of the British Pakistani Christian Association, said:

“Here is evidence that the judiciary in Pakistan is not independent and free from bias.

“The fact that Christian men could be spared a death penalty by simply renouncing their Christian faith and accepting Islam is a clear indication that either extremists have infiltrated the Justice system of Pakistan, or that the nation is full of zealots that will stop at nothing to convert ‘kaffir’ (infidels).

“For a major Pakistani newspaper to cover this story there must be some truth in this revelation.

“The Express Tribune even went as far as interviewing the prosecutor, Mr. Syed Anees Shah, who admitted offering the choice, before terminating the call abruptly.

“This whole fiasco has only served to heighten my concerns for Christians and other minorities in Pakistan, who are clearly in the middle of a cultural genocide, which inexorably will lead to more pain and anguish.” {eo}