

# Christian Girl Acquitted of Blasphemy in Pakistan

A Pakistani court dismissed **blasphemy charges** against a Christian girl on Tuesday who was jailed earlier this year for allegedly burning pages of the Quran. Advocates are concerned, however, that the girl's life will still be at risk from extremists if she remains in Pakistan.

**Rimsha Masih**, a 14-year-old girl with mental disabilities, was arrested for **defaming Islam** on Aug. 16 after she was allegedly spotted by neighbors with a plastic bag containing burned pages of the Quran. Rimsha was released on bail on Sep. 7 after being held for more than three weeks at a high-security prison in Rawalpindi. Her release came days after local Muslims testified against the neighborhood's imam, accusing him of framing the girl by planting the burned pages in her possession.

On Nov. 20, more than two months after Rimsha's release, the Islamabad High Court dismissed the girl's case, acquitting her of all charges. Rimsha's lawyer, Tahir Naveed, said the court's decision was based on the fact that no one had seen her burning pages of the Quran, Reuters reports.

A leading human rights campaigner told BBC that Rimsha's life may still be at risk from extremists. Rimsha and her family have been living in hiding at an undisclosed location since her release in September; it is unlikely that she will ever be able to return home.

"Once you have been accused of blasphemy it means the relocation of your family even if you are acquitted by the court," the director of a Pakistan human rights organization in Lahore told International Christian Concern (ICC). "The people who were willing to burn Rimsha alive are now even

angrier ... There is no way she can go back to the same place.”

According to the advocacy group Human Rights First, 46 people charged for blasphemy in the past 25 years have been killed by extremists while awaiting trial or after having been acquitted. The Islamabad-based Center for Research and Security Studies showed similar findings, reporting that 52 people have been killed by vigilantes since 1990 after being implicated in blasphemy cases.

“While ICC welcomes the news of Rimsha’s acquittal, the fact is that she should have never been charged or imprisoned in the first place. Because of false allegations against Rimsha, she is forced to start a new life in a country that is no longer safe for her. This all occurred as a result of Pakistan’s oppressive blasphemy laws that victimize innocent minorities by giving radical Muslims grounds to inflict vigilante justice in accordance to their own religious decrees,” says Aidan Clay, ICC Regional Manager for the Middle East.

“Many Christians and other minorities still languish in Pakistani prisons on charges of insulting Islam, including Asia Bibi, who was given the death sentence in 2010 for allegedly criticizing Muhammad. This battle will not be won until the Pakistani government repeals the country’s ominous blasphemy laws. No one should fear being imprisoned or executed by their government or murdered by a mob simply because they are a member of a minority religious community.”