

Diplomats Confirm Asia Bibi Finally Freed

Pakistan's most famous blasphemy law victim, Asia Bibi, was finally released from her homeland, where she has become the most-hated figure in the country despite law courts exonerating her from the false charges that had kept her incarcerated in solitary confinement for almost 10 years.

In the early hours of the morning Wednesday, BPCA received confirmation from a British diplomat that Asia Bibi had safely exited Pakistan. Asia Bibi bravely held on to her faith through the most brutal of incarcerations that involved her having access to sunlight for two hours per month. Now she finally travels to Canada to be reunited with her children.

Bibi, a berry-picker, was beaten and raped for an alleged blasphemy offence in June 2009. While she was being beaten and berated by women colleagues, she simply uttered the words, "My Christ died for me. What did Muhammed do for you?" The men workers from her berry field then began their attack and returned with a mob a few days later to lynch her.

Other local Christians called the police to get her put into safe custody but a local Imam (Islamic preacher) then accused her of blasphemy and stated that he had personally witnessed the blasphemy despite being at neither event where the alleged crimes took place.

Bibi failed her High Court Appeal in November 2016. However on Oct. 31, 2018, a Supreme Court Appeal exonerated her original charges. Although the decision was made through Pakistan's Apex Court, she was forced to remain in the country to address a petition to her Supreme Court decision submitted by extremist group Tehreek-e-lebaaik. This was after the country's Prime Minister Imran Khan capitulated to the demands

of extremists whose riots had brought the country to a standstill.

In late January, three months after her acquittal by the Supreme Court, the court finally quashed the petition by Tehreek-e-Labaaik in essence finally declaring Bibi free and freeing her from her original charges completely.

In April, Prime Minister Imran Khan stated that a “complication” has delayed the Bibi’s departure from the country.

British Pakistani Christian Association Chairman, Wilson Chowdhry has been communicating with the husband of Asia Bibi daily up until Monday, May 6.

“Ashiq has always remained hopeful of an imminent release from Pakistan, and we have both been shocked at how long it has taken,” Chowdhry said. “Asia Bibi and Ashiq have remained resolute in their faith and have prayed daily for their release and today God has answered their prayers.” BPCA are grateful that we have been able to be a part of this family’s journey to freedom and will continue to pray for them and assist them where we can.”

He added:

Having spoken to various diplomats and government officials, I have been astounded by reports that the delay was caused by the myopic approach by leaders of Pakistan’s military who have prevented the exit of Asia Bibi through fear of the bad press the nation of Pakistan would receive. Their pernicious delays have only served to fuel more international shame on a country which has already hit rock-bottom with their poor human rights record.

Asia Bibi is unwell and has suffered 10 years of isolation both in and out of captivity – she must be treated with utmost care and receive appropriate medical care now she is

free.

The Pakistani government must ensure Asia and her family are compensated for the loss to their freedom and the fragile safety they have had to suffer under their auspices. Moreover, moves must be made to reform or abrogate the infamous blasphemy laws of Pakistan.

Several campaigns have failed to alter or remove the draconian blasphemy laws of Pakistan. These laws were introduced to India by Britain in 1860 to protect Muslims from Hindus, but the Pakistan Penal Code was Islamized in the 1980s by dictator Zia Ul Haq and has since been used as a tool for discrimination by Islamists and to exhort property and settle vendettas with Christians and Ahmadis by Muslims.