

Facing Execution, Asia Bibi Stands Firm in Her Faith

She's a committed Christian. A mother of five. A loving wife. A servant of all.

But will she also be a martyr?

That's Asia Bibi. She has been sentenced to death by hanging under Pakistan's Shariah blasphemy law. She was targeted as a member of the sole Christian family in her small Pakistani village. She was falsely accused of "blasphemy" – for supposedly speaking against the prophet Muhammad.

Last week an appeals court in Lahore, Pakistan upheld her execution sentence.

Here's how this valiant Christian woman describes her plight, in her own words:

I'm the victim of a cruel, collective injustice.

I've been locked up, handcuffed and chained, banished from the world and waiting to die. I don't know how long I've got left to live. Every time my cell door opens my heart beats faster. My life is in God's hands and I don't know what's going to happen to me. It's a brutal, cruel existence. But I am innocent. I'm guilty only of being presumed guilty. I'm starting to wonder whether being a Christian in Pakistan today is not just a failing, or a mark against you, but actually a crime.

But though I'm kept in a tiny, windowless cell, I want my voice and my anger to be heard. I want the whole world to know that I'm going to be hanged for helping my neighbor. I'm guilty of having shown someone sympathy. What did I do wrong? I drank water from a well belonging to Muslim women, using

“their” cup, in the burning heat of the midday sun.

I, Asia Bibi, have been sentenced to death because I was thirsty. I’m a prisoner because I used the same cup as those Muslim women, because water served by a Christian woman was regarded as unclean by my stupid fellow fruit-pickers.

That day, June 14, 2009, is imprinted on my memory.

It’s as simple and devastating as that. For five years, she’s been imprisoned on death row over a cup of water. But what’s really at issue here is her Christian faith.

To her radical Islamic community and under Shariah law in Pakistan, her Christian faith is her “crime.” It’s her death sentence.

Her family is in hiding, fearing for their lives. In addition to the death sentence, Asia Bibi has a price on her head. A radical cleric has implored the Taliban to carry out her execution sentence before the Pakistani government does. Two Pakistani government officials who have spoken out on her behalf are now dead, murdered in cold blood for standing up for her human rights.

This atrocity cannot stand. No one – anywhere – should ever be put to death because of their religious beliefs.

All of us who have the freedom to speak out have the responsibility to speak out. It’s incumbent upon all of us to demand her freedom.

Though she has one final appeal at Pakistan’s Supreme Court, it is often public pressure and not a legal argument that wins freedom in these cases.

We’ve seen it in the case of Christian Pastor Youcef Nadarkhani who is now free from a death sentence in Iran for his Christian faith, and we saw it just a couple of months ago

with another Christian mom freed from death row in Sudan. Meriam Ibrahim had been convicted and sentenced to death for her Christian faith, much like what Asia Bibi is now facing. Meriam is now free because of the international outcry of hundreds of thousands around the world.

It's time to raise our voices once again and #FreeBibi. In just 24 hours, over 100,000 people have signed that ACLJ's petition for Asia Bibi's freedom at .

We're mobilizing through our international offices, in Pakistan itself, here in Washington, and at the United Nations demanding her release. We must pray, but we must also act. Asia Bibi must not be allowed to die for being a Christian.

This article originally was posted here on the ACLJ website. It also is crossposted on Red State.