

# Imprisoned Nearly 5 Years, Woman Falsely Accused of Blasphemy Gets Court Date

After spending 4 1/2 years in prison, Asia Bibi finally has a court hearing.

In June 2009, Bibi was accused and sentenced to death after being falsely accused of blasphemy. Since then, the court has delayed the case four times.

Asia's first hearing of the appeal process is set for May 27.

Judges hearing the case say they are postponing it because of threats and pressures from radical Islamist groups. Fearing what the extremist groups might do, the judges avoid the responsibility of deciding what to do with such a delicate case.

Lawyer Mushtaq Gill, head of the NGO LEAD, says, "In Asia Bibi's case, any delay or postponement means denying justice. Too often Christians are considered as 'secondary class citizens,' [and] justice is denied, especially when they are accused of blasphemy."

Even though most of the accusations are false, Christians branded as "blasphemous" risk their own lives and the lives of those trying to defend them. There are cases where Islamic leaders have issued a *fatwa* (religious decree) publicly inviting the faithful to kill the supposed "blasphemer." Because of this, Christians who are often accused and released are forced to leave the country to save their lives.

Even their lawyers are victims of intimidation and threats. Gill explains, "The battle against extremists in Pakistan cannot be won until the government puts in place the necessary

legislative reforms. What needs to be done to get to the root of the problem is to first of all repeal the blasphemy laws without fearing the reaction of extremists.”

Please continue to pray for Asia Bibi as she awaits justice. Pray for strength and courage. Pray that there will be no delay in the hearing.

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