

Persecuted Christian Asia Bibi's Appeal Hearing Delayed for Third Time

Appeal proceedings have been delayed again in the case of Asia Bibi, the Christian mother of five sentenced to death for blasphemy.

Lahore high court judges Sardar Tariq Masood and Abdul Sami Khan adjourned the case shortly after the hearing began and arguments were presented.

Court sources say that a new date for the appeal is expected tomorrow in a case that has dragged on without any progress for quite some time.

For several months, extremist groups have been making threats against the judges in order to pressure them to confirm the death penalty imposed by the lower court.

However, the woman's lawyers say they remain confident and hopeful that the high court will soon overturn her conviction and let her go.

In recent days, Pakistani Christians have promoted days of fasting and prayer on behalf of Asia Bibi and Sawan Masih, both of whom are innocent but sentenced to death under the infamous "black law."

Asia Bibi, who has been on death row since November 2010 and held under solitary confinement on security grounds, has become a symbol of the fight against blasphemy.

Punjab Gov. Salman Taseer and Federal Minority Affairs Minister Shahbaz Bhatti, a Catholic, were killed in 2011 for coming to her defense.

Masih, a 26-year-old Christian from Lahore, was convicted recently by a lower court on false charges as a result of a personal dispute with the person who reported him.

It is sad “to see how the situation in Pakistan is getting worse by the day, not only for minorities, but especially for women and girls,” Father James Chand, from the Archdiocese of Lahore, told *AsiaNews*.

“Let us continue to pray for Asia Bibi and Sawan Masih,” he added.

Father Arthur Nat, a priest from Central Punjab, joined Chand’s appeal, calling for “a day of fasting and prayer on Wednesday.”

Meanwhile, a new case of child sexual assault has been reported. On Sunday, a 12-year-old girl was raped by an Islamic cleric in a Punjab mosque.

Witnesses say the imam sent students home, asking the girl to stay. He then assaulted her □□with the help of four boys.

The girl’s family plans to report the crime, but it appears the religious leader has already fled the area without leaving a trace.

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