

Religious Freedom Advocates Demand Pakistan Release Christian Couple Sentenced to Death for Blasphemy

Over a dozen civil society members of the International Religious Freedom Roundtable are demanding that the Pakistani government release a Christian couple sentenced to death for blasphemy.

Shafqat Emmanuel and Shagufta Kausar were originally sentenced in 2014 after a local imam named Muhammad Hussain accused them of sending texts insulting the Islamic prophet Muhammad, reports the International Christian Concern. Hussain claims he received the blasphemous messages from an unknown number during prayers. The couple continues to deny the allegations.

After five years in prison, Emmanuel and Kausar are finally expecting a court hearing soon, according to the Religious Freedom Institute (RFI).

The RFI says the couple's case is "marred by irregularities," including the allegedly blasphemous messages being in English even though Emmanuel and Kausar don't speak English. And according to Pakistan Today, the plaintiff's attorneys publicly threatened violence if the court didn't find the couple guilty.

In International Religious Freedom's letter to Pakistani Ambassador to the U.S. Asad Majeed Khan, the group rebukes the Pakistani government for using blasphemy laws to unjustly imprison Christians. The letter states that despite Pakistan's efforts to elect officials of diverse religions and releasing Christian prisoner Asia Bibi, "the most dangerous form of persecution directed at religious minorities ... are blasphemy

laws which have led to the unfair imprisonment of hundreds of minorities, mostly Christian.”

IRF also states that these blasphemy laws “continue to be used as a weapon of religious persecution. They not only threaten the well-being of Pakistan’s religious minorities but the very possibility of a Pakistani democracy built on justice. They should be eliminated.”

Open Doors USA ranks Pakistan as the fifth-worst country in the world regarding persecution against Christians. {eoa}