

Face of International Christian Persecution Set Free After Harrowing Ordeal on Death Row

Asia Bibi is free! Chief Justice Saqib Nasir has given the order to release her as soon as possible, and she has been found not guilty of all charges of blasphemy. The chief justice is reported to have said: "Her conviction is set aside, and she is to be relieved forthwith."

The portions of the 56-page verdict, written by the chief justice highlighting the importance of the presumption of innocence until proven guilty, were released in DAWN and read as follows:

"It is a well settled principle of law that one who makes an assertion has to prove it. Thus, the onus rests on the prosecution to prove guilt of the accused beyond reasonable doubt throughout the trial ...

"Presumption of innocence remains throughout the case until such time the prosecution on the evidence satisfies the court beyond reasonable doubt that the accused is guilty of the offence alleged against him.

"[...] The expression 'proof beyond reasonable doubt' is of fundamental importance to the criminal justice: it is one of the principles which seeks to ensure that no innocent person is convicted.

"Keeping in mind the evidence produced by the prosecution against the alleged blasphemy committed by the appellant, the prosecution has categorically failed to prove its case beyond reasonable doubt."

In Pakistan, early-morning messages were going out across the nation as Pakistan's Supreme Court prepared to render its final verdict on Asia Bibi's case. To read more about the lead-up to the verdict, [click here](#).

Christians and Christian institutions have been warned with alerts to be careful due to the high risk of revenge attacks. Christians have been bracing themselves for expected violence following the verdict.

The head of Tehreek Labaik has released a special video in which he is telling his party faithful to get ready for anything if the decision is favor of Asia Bibi. In a previous rally following the delay of judgement, he uttered death threats against the authorities and directed his followers to revolt by staging protests without direction from the central party.

Protests have already started as a result of Asia Bibi's not-guilty verdict. Islamabad has been blocked off by protesters shouting slogans, and the police are on standby.

A perimeter has been formed by law enforcement around sensitive targets and important government buildings.

The government of Pakistan has had mobile phones registered in a special campaign over the past month and could possibly cut off mobile service. A few weeks ago, we also heard reports of military exercises taking place, perhaps in an effort to prepare for possible backlash to the verdict.

Christians are understandably concerned about their well-being and that of their communities with mobs of people forming, but they are overjoyed at the news.

Our BPCA lead officer in Pakistan, Mehwish Bhatti, said:

"We are so happy and thankful to God for this big day! All glory goes to Him. The decision was tough; God has

strengthened the resolve of the justices and has made it possible. I pray for the peace of minorities, let God be their guardian.”

Wilson Chowdhry, chairman of the British Pakistani Christian Association, said:

“Asia Bibi has endured almost 10 years of brutal incarceration in isolation. The world has watched her suffer, but today, thanks to the grace of God, the world rejoices.

“Her freedom can hardly be called justice, and nothing will ever compensate her for her lost years.

“For now, we can only pray that she is given the counseling and support she needs to recover and restore her place in society—this will of course be in a nation far away from Pakistan, where it is untenable for her to remain.”

He added:

“Pakistan is increasingly exhibiting an intolerance to non-Muslims; that has to be tackled by its government. That extremists can induce riots and bring the country to a standstill is bewildering.

“We call on the government of Pakistan to assure Christians their safety during these tumultuous times; moreover, we call for people to pray for a restoration of peace in a nation that is riven by fundamentalism.”