Victims of Apostasy & Blasphemy

“We are not to simply bandage the wounds of victims beneath the wheels of injustice, we are to drive a spoke into the wheel itself.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer
Asia Bibi, Pakistan
Imprisoned 2009–2018

Asia Bibi, a Christian woman sentenced to death for alleged blasphemy, is freed after spending years in a Pakistani prison. In 2009 Muslim co-workers accused Mrs Bibi, a mother of five, of blasphemy. She was subsequently arrested and imprisoned. A Pakistani court sentenced her to death by hanging. In June 2010 the verdict was upheld by Lahore High Court which received worldwide attention. In 2011, on two separate occasions, Islamists shot and killed the federal Minister for Minorities Shahbaz Bhatti and Punjab Governor Salman Taseer for advocating on behalf of Asia Bibi and opposing the blasphemy laws. In October 2018, after nearly ten years on death row and separated from her children, constantly fearing for her life, the Supreme Court of Pakistan acquitted Asia based on insufficient evidence. Despite this she was held under armed guard and was not able to leave Pakistan until May 2019. She is now living in exile in Canada. Asia Bibi refused to give up her Christian faith in exchange for immediate freedom.

Raif Badawi, Saudi Arabia
Imprisoned 2013 -

Police authorities arrested Raif Badawi, a Saudi blogger, writer and activist in June 2012. Badawi was arrested for "insulting Islam through electronic channels" and for apostasy (the abandonment of Islam by a Muslim). In 2013 the court convicted him on several charges and sentenced him to seven years in prison and 600 lashes. In 2014 his sentence was increased to 10 years in prison, 1000 lashes, and a fine. The first 50 lashes were administered on January 9, 2015. The remaining 950 floggings have been postponed more than 12 times due to Badawi’s poor health. The reason for the most recent postponement is unknown, but the previous scheduled floggings were delayed due to Badawi’s poor health.
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Hadi Al–Mutif, Saudi Arabia
Imprisoned 1993–2011

When Hadi Al–Mutif was training in a Saudi police camp in 1993, two of his colleagues accused him of satire of the Prophet Mohammad. Hardliner judge Abdullah Al–Mukhlaf sentenced him to death because of his Ismaili beliefs. The court identified Hadi as an unbeliever, or 'Kafir', as the judge stated in the death sentence. He was released from prison around November 2011.

Naghash Zargaran, Iran
Imprisoned 2013–2017

Police arrested Zargaran, a Christian convert in January 2013 for her involvement with house churches in Iran. She served a four year prison sentence for “threatening national security” for her Christian activities. While in prison, prison guards repeatedly denied her medical treatment for longstanding medical issues. In August 2017 she was released from Tehran’s notorious Evin Prison.

Robert Hussain, Kuwait
1996

Hussein, who has changed his first name to Robert, was ruled an apostate by an Islamic court on May 29 (CT, July 15, 1996, p. 54). Under strict Islamic law, any Muslim who deserts Islam is forcibly divorced, deprived of parental and inheritance rights, and subject to execution if unrepentant.
Mariam Ibraheem, Sudan
Imprisoned 2014

Mariam Ibraheem is a Sudanese Christian who was imprisoned in December 2013 for apostasy and blasphemy because of her faith, and later sentenced to death. Because she refused to recant her faith they declared her an apostate and imprisoned her along with her 9-month-old son, Martin. The court also sentenced her to 100 lashes for adultery as she had married a non-muslim man. While in prison she discovered she was pregnant, and her sentence of execution was postponed until after her daughter was born. Mariam gave birth to her daughter, Maya, chained in a prison cell in May 2014. Mariam’s story gained international attention, and many advocated for her release. Mariam and her children were released soon after Maya’s birth and finally allowed to leave Sudan accompanied by the Italian deputy foreign minster (see photo). She is now living in the United States.

Mohamed Hiajazi "Bishoy", Egypt
Imprisoned 2014–2016

Bishoy Armia, a convert to Christianity, made headlines in 2008 when he lobbied to have his religion changed from Islam to Christianity on his national identity card. Bishoy’s request was rejected and he went into hiding until the Arab Spring. He was not allowed to leave the country and his life was threatened. In 2014 an Egyptian prosecutor ordered his detention and he was arrested on suspicion of inciting religious strife, according to state media. In the summer of 2016 he faced a lot of pressure and abuse in prison. He was released in 2016 after appearing on a video clip saying that he had returned to Islam.
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Saeed Abedini, Iran
Imprisoned 2012–2016

Saeed Abedini was released from Iranian prison on 15th January, 2016 in an American/Iran prison swap. Saeed is an Iranian American Christian pastor who had been detained in Iran since the summer of 2012 and incarcerated in Evin Prison since September 2012. On January 27, 2013, the court sentenced him to eight years in prison, reportedly on charges of undermining national security through his Christian evangelical activities in Iran in the early 2000s.

Mahmoud Mohammed Taha, Sudan
Hanged 1985

Mahmoud Mohammed Taha was a Sudanese religious thinker, leader and trained engineer. On 5th January 1985 police arrested Taha for distributing pamphlets calling for an end to Shari'a law in Sudan. Brought to trial on 7th January 1985 he refused to participate. The trial lasted two hours with the main evidence being confessions that the defendant was opposed to Sudan's interpretation of Islamic law. The next day the court sentenced him to death along with four other followers (who later recanted and were pardoned) for "heresy, opposing application of Islamic law, disturbing public security, provoking opposition against the government, and reestablishing a banned political party."
Authorities executed him at the age of 76. This in contradiction to Sudanese law which states that anyone over the age of 75 cannot receive the death penalty.
Mehdi Dibaj, Iran
Murdered 1994

Mehdi Dibaj was an Iranian Christian convert from Sunni Islam, a pastor and a Christian martyr. Dibaj became a Christian as a young man and joined the Jama'at-e Rabbani Church, the Iranian branch of the Assemblies of God. After the 1979 Iranian revolution he encountered difficulties. In 1983 the Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS) arrested and imprisoned him without a trial in Sari and systematically tortured him. He was finally tried by an Islamic court in Sari on 3rd December 1993 and sentenced to death on charges of apostasy. At his trial Dibaj declared: "I am not only satisfied to be in prison for the honour of His Holy Name, but am ready to give my life for the sake of Jesus my Lord." Following a worldwide outcry initiated by his friend and colleague Bishop Haik Hovsepian Mehr, Dibaj was finally freed in January 1994, although the death sentence was not lifted. Just three days later, Bishop Mehr was abducted and murdered. Dibaj was abducted on 24th June 1994. His body was found in a west Tehran park on 5th July 1994. Four years later the regime's officials admitted that the priest’s murder was carried out by the MOIS.

Lina Joy, Malaysia
Conversion case 2007

Lina Joy, 43, was named Azlina Jailani and was brought up as a Muslim, but at the age of 26 decided to become a Christian. Later she wanted to marry her Christian boyfriend, a cook, but she couldn’t do so while her identity card declared her to be a Muslim. She fought to have the word “Islam” removed from her identity card. After six years the country's highest court rejected the change. She and her boyfriend went into hiding and later escaped to Australia.

Mohammad Abbad, Jordan
Attached 2008

Mohammad Abbad, 40, fled Jordan after Muslims violently attacked him and his 10-year-old son in their home and his father sued him on charges of apostasy, or leaving Islam.

“I can’t win this case as long as I insist that I converted from Islam to Christianity,” Abbad wrote from the safety of a nearby country.

“The court will annul my marriage, I will be deprived of my kids, I will have no ID or passport, and my properties will be confiscated,” said the father of two, referring to a previous Jordanian apostasy verdict* from November 2004 when an Amman Sharia Court convicted a Muslim convert to Christianity of apostasy and stripped him of all his legal rights.


Abdul Rahman, Afghanistan
Imprisoned 2006

Abdul Rahman an Afghani citizen born 1965. Police arrested him in February 2006 and threatened with the death penalty for converting to Christianity.

On March 26, 2006, under heavy pressure from foreign governments, the court returned his case to prosecutors, citing "investigative gaps". He was released from prison to his family on the night of March 27. On March 29, Abdul Rahman arrived in Italy after the Italian government offered him asylum.
Home raided, Morocco
2010

A large, military-led team of Moroccan authorities raided a Bible study in a small city southeast of Marrakech, arresting 18 Moroccans and deporting a U.S. citizen, the leaders said. Approximately 60 officers from the Moroccan security services, on February 4, raided the home of a Christian in Amizmiz, a city of 10,000 mainly Berber people southeast of Marrakech. A church Bible study was in progress in the home with visitors from western and southern Morocco, the leaders said. Five of the 18 people held for 14 hours were small children, two of them infants no more than 6 months old. The other small children ranged from 20 months to 4 years old.

Mohammed Omar Haji,
Yemen
Imprisoned 2000

Mohammed Omer Haji, 27, a Somali Christian convert from Islam, was given a one-week ultimatum by Aden’s Tawahi Court to return to Islam, or face execution under Islamic law for committing apostasy. He was formally registered as a refugee under Case Nr.11911 with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Aden. According to Haji, the UNHCR officials in Khormaksar stated they were only able to help him if he was a Muslim. After 23 days in the Tawahi police station, he was transferred into the security police custody, and then imprisoned in the Mansoora Jail until his release March 13. He is now living in New Zealand with his family.
Ahok Punama, Indonesia
Imprisoned 2017

In 2017 Ahok Punama, then governor of Jakarta, was found guilty of blasphemy and sentenced to two years in jail for saying that the hadith (sayings of Mohammed) “non muslims should not rule over muslims” is a weak hadith. This was a clear sign that

- In Islam there is no freedom of expression and that Islam is above questioning and above any critique. Any challenge to its authenticity is considered blasphemy.
- Non-muslims according to Islamic law have no right to rule over muslims. This is a clear discrimination against non-muslims and if this hadith is applied, shows that Islam is not compatible with democracy.

Rahaf Mohammed, Saudi Arabia
Death threat 2019

Teenager Rahaf’s successful escape from the Kingdom Saudi Arabia via Thailand to Canada in 2019 highlights the situation of many women in the Kingdom. Rahaf says her family abused her and threatened to kill her for leaving Islam. She tweeted: “It’s been a year since I became free. Every time I wake up, I feel like I’m being born again! There’s always hope even if you don’t see it.#newlife”

Ardeshir Fanaian, Yalda Firouzian, Behanam Eskandarian, Iran
Imprisoned 2019

The Revolutionary Court in Iran’s Semnan Province sentenced three members of the Bahai religious minority to a total of 20 years in jail on national security charges. On October 2019 Fanaian was sentenced to 10 years and Firouzian and Eskandarian each to five years in prison.

www.iran-hrm.com
Nabila Umar Sanda and Simput Dafup, Nigeria
Imprisoned and tortured 2018 –

A Nigerian university student, Nabila Umar Sanda, who converted from Islam to Christianity and Simput Dafup, 33, who introduced her to Christianity, were arrested by state security forces. The pair were released after 10 days, but only after they had been tortured. Nabila was returned to her parents and kept under surveillance. After two months she escaped and went into hiding. Later she posted on Facebook that she’d converted to Christianity out of free choice.

Nabila escaped her pursuers going abroad for furthering of education. While in school, the institution requested her WASSCE original certificate and the school demanded that she come back to Nigeria for it. Since March 2019 she has been unlawfully detained while her studies are forcefully on hold. She is a prisoner of her faith in a democratic country like Nigeria where freedom of religion is constitutional. However, the amended Constitution from 1999 (Section 35, 38 and 39) has been abused, violated and relegated in Nigeria. Sources: www.guardian.ng/worldwatchmonitor.org/aishatunkeki.com

Ahmed Rilwan, the Maldives
Abducted 2014

On August 8, 2014, Rilwan an outspoken journalist who uncovered political corruption and its links to Islamist extremism boarded a commuter ferry and was never seen again.

After Maldivians voted out the corrupt government of Abdulla Yameen in September 2018, newly elected President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih established the Commission on Deaths and Enforced Disappearances to investigate Rilwan’s abduction and other attacks on bloggers and activists allegedly targeted by Islamist gangs. It now appears the 28-year-old Rilwan fell victim to the very crimes he was trying to expose.

Human rights activists in the Maldives have long alleged that police buried evidence linking Rilwan’s abduction to known gangs with ties to powerful politicians. Source: hrw.org
Victims accused of apostasy and blasphemy by non-state actors

Farag Foda, Egypt  
Assassinated 1992

Farag Foda worked as professor of agriculture. He wrote numerous books and contributed as a columnist to the Egyptian magazine October. Based in Cairo, Foda was noted for his critical articles and satires about Islamic fundamentalism in Egypt. In many newspaper articles, he pointed out weak points in Islamist ideology. Foda felt that he was defending Islam against its distortion by Islamists.

On 8th June 1992, shortly after mocking an ongoing dispute among ulamas (Muslim scholars) about sex in paradise, Foda was shot dead by two Islamic fundamentalists. His son and other bystanders were seriously wounded in the attack. The jihadist group Al-Gama’a al-Islamiyya claimed responsibility. One of those involved in Foda’s murder, Abu Al-’Ela Abd Rabbo, was released from prison in 2012 under Mohamed Morsi’s government having served his sentence.

Omar M Bataweel, Yemen  
Murdered 2016

Omar Mohammad Bataweel, a young man from Aden, was abducted and murdered, possibly for apostasy, after he wrote posts on social media that appeared critical of Islam. One Facebook post: “They accuse me of Atheism! Oh you people, I see God in the flowers, You see Him in the graveyards, That is the difference between me and you”. He was shot dead in 2014, only 17 years old.
Bridget Agbahime, Nigeria
Killed 2016

Bridget Agbahime, 74, originally from the southern state of Imo, was ambushed by an angry mob for allegedly blaspheming against Islam’s prophet in 2016.

Staff of Charlie Hebdo, France
Murdered 2015

On 7th January 2015, two Islamist gunmen forced their way into the Paris headquarters of Charlie Hebdo and opened fire, killing twelve: staff cartoonists Charb, Cabu, Honoré, Tignous and Wolinski, economist Bernard Maris, editors Elsa Cayat and Mustapha Ourrad, guest Michel Renaud, maintenance worker Frédéric Boisseau and police officers Brinsolaro and Merabet, and wounding eleven. During the attack, the gunmen shouted "Allahu akbar" ("God is great" in Arabic) and also "the Prophet is avenged". President François Hollande described it as a "terrorist attack of the most extreme barbarity". The two gunmen were identified as Saïd and Chérif Kouachi, French Muslim brothers of Algerian descent.

Ananta Bijoy Das, Bangladesh
Killed 2015

For the third time in 2015, Islamist radicals in Bangladesh hacked a secular writer to death in public. Four masked men chased down Ananta Bijoy Das as he left his home in Sylhet. "Ananta died on the spot," Metropolitan Police Commissioner Kamrul Hasan told the Daily Star. "Ananta was an organiser of local progressive publication outlet Jukti (logic) and a relentless writer on science." Das died at the age of 31.
Governor Salman Taseer, Pakistan
Assassinated 2011

Salman Taseer was a Pakistani businessman and politician who served as the governor of the province of Punjab from 2008 until his assassination in early 2011. A member of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), he had served also as a minister in the caretaker cabinet of Prime Minister Muhammad Mian Soomro under Pervez Musharraf. He was appointed to the post of governor on 15th May 2008, by then-President Musharraf at the request of the PPP establishment. On 4th January 2011, Taseer was assassinated in Islamabad by his own security guard, Mumtaz Qadri, who disagreed with Taseer's opposition to Pakistan's blasphemy law.

Samira Salih al–Nuaimi, Iraq
Executed 2014

IS (Islamic State) militants publicly executed Samira Salih al–Nuaimi, a leading lawyer and human rights activist, whom they claimed had abandoned Islam. Al–Nuaimi was kidnapped by IS on 17th September 2014 after she allegedly (in comments on Facebook) criticised the militant group's destruction of places of worship in Mosul, Iraq, since it had taken control of the city.

Fatima S, Germany
Killed 2017

Fatima S, a 38 year old mother of four, had been living in Germany since 2011. The former Muslim woman had converted to Christianity and was involved in a project to help refugees. It was run by her community church in Prien–am–Chiemsee in Bavaria. In May 2017 she was stabbed by a 29 year old refugee for being an apostate.
Fatima Sultan, Ali Ma’ow, Sheik Mohammed Abdi and Maaddey Diil, Somalia
Killed 2009

Fatima Sultan, Ali Ma’ow, Sheik Mohammed Abdi and Maaddey Diil were killed by members of Al–Shabab, an Islamic extremist organisation. The Islamists kidnapped and eventually beheaded the Christians after they refused to renounce their faith in Jesus Christ. On August 4, 2009, a junior Al–Shabab militant notified all the families of the victims that the four Christians had been beheaded for apostasy. He described the Christians as promoters of “fitna”, a Muslim term for religious discord. The militant, who called himself “Seiful Islam (“the Sword of Islam”), told the families that the bodies will not be given to them “as Somalia does not have cemeteries for infidels.” One eye witness account said, “All the four apostates were given an opportunity to return to Islam to be released but they all declined the generous offer.”
The four Christians had been working for a local NGO that helps orphans in southern Somalia.
Source: persecution.org

Theo Van Gogh, the Netherlands
Killed 2004

Theo Van Gogh was a columnist, author, actor, television director and film producer. He worked with the Somali–born writer Ayaan Hirsi Ali, to produce the film ‘Submission’, which criticized the treatment of women in Islam and aroused controversy among Muslims. On 2nd November 2004 he was assassinated by Mohammed Bouyeri, a Dutch–Moroccan Muslim.
Mena Mangal, Afghanistan  
Killed 2019

Mena Mangal, an Afghan journalist and political advisor, was shot dead in May 2019. Ms Mangal was a passionate advocate of women’s rights, speaking out for women’s right to an education and to work. Afghanistan has seen a number of assassinations of women in public positions by insurgents who object to women having a role in public life or speaking about women’s rights.

Amal Farah, United Kingdom  
Death threats

Mrs Farah, was born in the Somali capital, Mogadishu, but now lives in Britain. The 33 year old financial manager had carried out an act so heinous, her family felt she deserved to die. She had renounced her Islamic faith - “and within my community, that's a capital offence,” she said. “They believe you deserve to die.” It was the case of Meriam Ibrahim(see page 4) that prompted her to speak out. She was too afraid; even in the UK, it was safer for her to keep a low profile.

source: www.telegraph.co.uk

Ali Mustaf Maka’il, Somalia  
Killed 2006

Ali Mustaf Maka’il, 22, college freshman and cloth merchant, was shot and killed in northern Mogadishu, Somalia, on September 7, 2006. He converted from Islam to Christianity eleven months before a gunman loyal to the Union of Islamic Courts shot Mr. Ali in the back after he refused to join a Qur’an chanting crowd in response to the lunar eclipse.
An Open Letter to Delegations to the United Nations regarding

Apostasy and Blasphemy Laws

Set My People Free, Kamal Fahmi, President
Forum for Religious Freedom-Europe, Aaron Rhodes, President

Against Human Rights

Apostasy laws make it a criminal offense to change one’s religion. In doing so, they seek to deprive individuals of the ability to choose what to believe about the Divine. The capacity for moral choice is what makes people human; it is part of our essential common human nature, upon which the very idea of human rights is based. Restricting the freedom to choose one’s religion, and to change it, is an assault on the very core of human nature. Apostasy laws cannot change human nature; people will always be compelled to seek the truth about questions of ultimacy. But apostasy laws bring immense suffering by persecuting men and women—simply for exercising their freedom of conscience, that is, for being human.
Apostasy laws are intrinsically wrong, but they also have negative social and political consequences everywhere they are in force. They create instability and inspire violence. They create conflict with minority communities. They bring shame in the international community, tarnishing the reputation of states.

**Blasphemy laws** make perceived “insults” to religions illegal, and can make it a crime even to question religious doctrines. Such laws are an assault on intellectual and moral freedom, and the freedom of expression, which all people possess and which are essential parts of their humanity; they are freedoms that are protected under international law. Blasphemy laws make the state the judge of truth, and are thus often used to persecute political opponents. Blasphemy laws are often arbitrarily applied, leading to tragic persecutions and the murder and execution of innocent people.

**Against International Law**

The United Nations Human Rights Committee has ruled that apostasy and blasphemy laws are **inconsistent with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR):**

*The Committee observes that the freedom to "have or to adopt" a religion or belief necessarily entails the freedom to choose a religion or belief, including the right to replace one's current religion or belief with another or to adopt atheistic views, as well as the right to retain one's religion or belief. Article 18.2 bars coercion that would impair the right to have or adopt a religion or belief, including the use of threat of physical force or penal sanctions to compel believers or non-believers to adhere to their religious beliefs and congregations, to recant their religion or belief or to convert. Policies or practices having the same intention or effect, such as, for example, those restricting access to education, medical care, employment or the rights guaranteed by article 25 and other provisions of the Covenant, are similarly inconsistent with article 18.2. The same protection is enjoyed by holders of all beliefs of a non-religious nature. (General Comment 22)*

*Prohibitions of displays of lack of respect for a religion or other belief system, including blasphemy laws, are incompatible with the Covenant, except in the specific circumstances envisaged in article 20, paragraph 2, of the Covenant. Such prohibitions must also comply with the strict requirements of article 19, paragraph 3, as well as such articles as 2, 5, 17, 18 and 26. Thus, for instance, it would be*
impermissible for any such laws to discriminate in favor of or against one or certain religions or belief systems, or their adherents over another, or religious believers over non-believers. Nor would it be permissible for such prohibitions to be used to prevent or punish criticism of religious leaders or commentary on religious doctrine and tenets of faith. (Gener

A Shameful Record

Nineteen (19) UN member states criminalize apostasy, and in 12 of those states, apostasy is punishable by the death penalty. Other typical punishments for apostasy include the annulment of marriages of apostates, and presenting inheritances.

As of 2012, almost 25 percent of countries worldwide had some form of blasphemy laws or policies. 1

A Way Forward

As nongovernmental organizations promoting the freedom of religion, we are proposing an international dialogue among nations and United Nations experts that could show the way toward the abolishment of apostasy and blasphemy laws. We seek your ideas and your support.

Set My People Free, Kamal Fahmi, President
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1 Pew Research Center, 28 May 2014
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Pew Research Center, 28 May 2014

Countries where apostasy and blasphemy laws are applied in certain regions or among certain people groups.

1. Nigeria
2. Mali

Countries where conversion from Islam and blasphemy is criminalised and punished by anyone or several of the following: jail sentence, torture, loss of child custody and marriage annulment.

3. Algeria
4. Bahrain
5. Comoros Islands
6. Egypt
7. Indonesia
8. Iraq
9. Jordan
10. Libya
11. Malaysia
12. Morocco and Western Sahara
13. Oman
14. Syria
15. Uzbekistan

Countries where conversion from Islam and blasphemy is criminalised, and punishable by death.

16. Afghanistan
17. Brunei
18. Iran
19. Kuwait
20. Maldives
21. Mauritania
22. North Sudan
23. Pakistan
24. Qatar
25. Saudi Arabia
26. Somalia
27. United Arab Emirates
28. Yemen

Apostasy means leaving or giving up one’s religious faith.

Blasphemy in Islam is any objection to the authenticity of Islam, its laws or prophet.
Thank you for making the plight of the oppressed known.

Please write to this email for press information:
smpf.event@gmail.com