

Persecution against Ahmadi Muslims Escalated to Include Minor Children

Toronto: Ahmadiyya Muslim Community worldwide condemns the actions of the Pakistani Police, who have escalated the persecution against Ahmadis to now include children. Under pressure from Islamic Fundamentalist Group police arrested five members of the community, including four minor children aged between 14 and 16 on false charges of desecrating the name of the Holy Prophet (Peace and Blessings of Allah on him).

On January 28, 2009 Pakistani police, in a small village of District Layyah, conducted raids and arrested one 50 year old adult and four minor children from their homes, and charged them under Section 295-C of the Pakistan Penal Code. These arrested are being accused of desecrating the name of the Holy Prophet by inscribing it on a wall of a toilet at the Jamia Gulzar-e-Madina Mosque. If found guilty S 295-C carries a death penalty or life imprisonment

The Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) has formally condemned the arrests, whilst Asma Jahangir the chairwoman of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan and Special Rapporteur of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights has also condemned the arrests of the children as 'heinous'.

Mr Salim-ud-Din, Spokesperson for the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat in Pakistan said: "These allegations are completely false and baseless. The police have no evidence whatsoever and have merely succumbed to the pressure of those who spread religious hatred in the region." It is noteworthy that none of the persons arrested have any connection to the Gulzar-e-Medina Mosque and they do not live anywhere near it.

The Asian Human Rights Commission said in a statement, "Family members were told (by the District Police Officer) that the police were under pressure from fundamentalists to act against the children. If he did not arrest them, the group had threatened to close down the whole city and attack the houses of Ahmadi sect members... The AHRC urges the government of President Asif Zardari to immediately release the illegally detained prisoners."

In a statement Mr. Lal Khan Malik, President of Ahmadiyya Community in Canada said, "Pakistan has ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and that Pakistan is in prima facie breach of at least Articles 14 and 37. Article 14 relates to 'Freedom of Religion' whilst Article 37 relates to punishments for crimes. Not only this but Pakistan has this tendency of backtracking on the treaties it signs, including the declaration at the UN Inter-Faith Conference. It is time Pakistan started fulfilling its commitments to the world, especially the citizen's of its own country".

He further stated that the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at reveres the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) as the final law-bearing prophet. No disrespect

towards him could ever be tolerated by any Ahmadi; man, woman or child. The Founder of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at, Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad wrote: "The man who in his being and his attributes and his actions and through his spiritual and holy faculties set an example of perfection and was called the perfect man was Muhammad (peace be upon him)." The Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at urges the immediate release of the five persons imprisoned and for all charges to be dropped. In a country that seeks to promote an image of tolerance to the Western world, it speaks volumes that peace-loving children have been charged with an offence that sanctions the death penalty as a sentence.

The International Community, Media and Human Rights Organisations are all urged to take serious note of this matter. In an era where freedom of religion and belief is accepted as a basic human right throughout the world, it is of disbelief that anti-Ahmadiyya legislation is still active and indeed still being so cruelly enforced in Pakistan.