

Open Letter to the Commonwealth Secretariat A Call to Suspend Pakistan from the Commonwealth Over Blasphemy Laws and Human Rights Violations

To the Commonwealth Secretary-General,

Ahead of the [Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting](#) in Samoa, 21-26 October 2024,

We, the undersigned, write to express our grave concern over the continued and escalating human rights abuses occurring in Pakistan, with particular attention to the use of Blasphemy laws. These laws have led to the wrongful arrest, imprisonment, and, tragically, the deaths of many individuals, including Christians, Ahmadis and other religious minorities, as well as those accused without trial or evidence.

The Commonwealth Charter acknowledges the challenges of modern times, referring to “unprecedented threats to peace and security, and a surge in popular demands for democracy, human rights and broadened economic opportunities.” These values, which form the core principles of the Commonwealth of Nations, are clearly being disregarded by the government of Pakistan.

Pakistan’s Blasphemy laws, though not leading to any state-sanctioned executions to date, have fuelled a culture of vigilante violence and lawlessness.

Accused individuals, including members of religious minorities, students, politicians, and those suffering from mental health issues, have been brutally murdered before they can face trial. These extrajudicial killings often occur with the tacit approval, or at least the passive observation, of law enforcement officials, with no repercussions for the perpetrators.

Since 1990, local media and independent researchers have recorded at least 85 cases of individuals murdered in relation to blasphemy accusations. These victims have been lynched, burned alive, shot in courtrooms, and hacked to death in public. The frequency and impunity with which these crimes are committed underlines the systemic nature of the persecution faced by religious minorities and others who are falsely accused.

Despite international condemnation, the government of Pakistan has failed to reform these laws or protect its citizens from mob violence. Its inaction directly contravenes the values espoused by the Commonwealth and damages the credibility of the organisation as a force for promoting democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.

Given the severity of the situation and the Pakistani government’s unwillingness or inability to uphold Commonwealth principles, we respectfully urge the Commonwealth Heads of State to consider suspending Pakistan from the Commonwealth of Nations.

As you are aware, Pakistan has been suspended twice before: from 18th October 1999 to 22nd May 2004, and from 22 November 2007 to 22 May 2008.

In both instances, the suspensions were in response to issues that compromised Pakistan's commitment to democratic governance and the protection of fundamental human rights.

We believe that decisive action is once again necessary. The Commonwealth cannot remain silent while one of its member states systematically violates the rights of religious minorities and fails to prevent the extrajudicial execution of its own citizens.

We urge you to act swiftly, applying pressure on the Pakistani government to put an end to the institutionalised persecution enabled by the Blasphemy laws. By suspending Pakistan from the Commonwealth, you will send a clear message that these egregious violations of human rights will not be tolerated within the Commonwealth community.

Yours sincerely,

Signatories

Human Rights Without Frontiers, EU Transparency Registration (Belgium)

Willy Fautré, director

Bitter Winter (Italy)

Marco Respinti, director in charge

CAP/ Liberté de conscience with UN ECOSOC status (France)

Thierry Valle, director

Center for Studies on Freedom of Religion Belief and Conscience/ LIREC (Italy)

Raffaella di Marzi, director

Center for Studies on New Religions/ CESNUR (Italy)

Massimo Introvigne, founder and managing director

European Association for the Defense of Minorities (Belgium)

Manel Msalmi, President.

European Federation for Freedom of Belief/ FOB (UK)

Alessandro Amicarelli, chairman

European Sikh Organization, EU Transparency Registration (Belgium)

Binder Singh, director

Forum for Religious Freedom (Austria)

Peter Zoehrer, director

International Human Rights Committee (Sweden)

Nasim Malik, secretary general

International Observatory of Religious Liberty of Refugees: ORLIR (Lithuania)

Rosita Šorytė, co-founder and president.

Jubilee Campaign (United Kingdom)

Joseph Janson, advocacy officer

Jubilee Campaign (USA)

Hulda Fahmi, advocacy officer

Mensenrechten zonder Grenzen (Netherlands)

Hans Noot, director

Set My People Free (Sweden)

Kamal Fahmi, director

South Asia Democratic Forum, EU Transparency Registration (Belgium)

Paulo Casaca, director

World Council for Public Diplomacy and Community Dialogue

Andy Vermaut, President.

Contact:

Gary Cartwright

0032 487 368244

gary@oveos-interactive.com