

— SELECTED — BLASPHEMY CASES



SEPTEMBER 2017

U.S. COMMISSION ON INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM



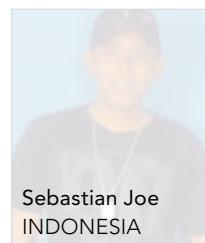
Mohamed
Abdullah al-Nasr
EGYPT



Andry Cahya
INDONESIA



Ahmed Musadeq
INDONESIA



Sebastian Joe
INDONESIA



Basuki "Ahok"
Tjahaja Purnama
INDONESIA



Mahful Muis
Tumanurung
INDONESIA



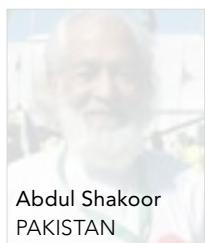
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Kazemeini
Boroujerdi
IRAN



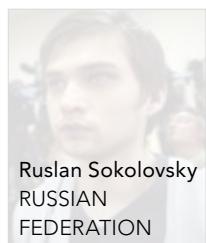
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Ali Taheri
IRAN



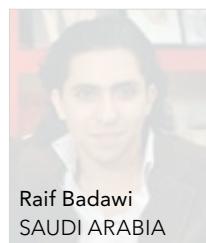
Aasia Bibi
PAKISTAN



Abdul Shakoor
PAKISTAN



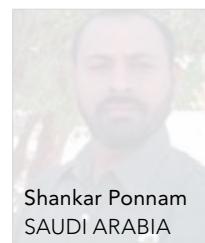
Ruslan Sokolovsky
RUSSIAN
FEDERATION



Raif Badawi
SAUDI ARABIA



Ashraf Fayadh
SAUDI ARABIA



Shankar Ponnam
SAUDI ARABIA

UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

SELECTED BLASPHEMY CASES

SEPTEMBER 2017

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SELECTED BLASPHEMY CASES

Many countries today have blasphemy laws. Blasphemy is defined as “the act of insulting or showing contempt or lack of reverence for God.” Across the globe, billions of people view blasphemy as deeply offensive to their beliefs.

Respecting Rights? Measuring the World’s Blasphemy Laws, a U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) report, documents the 71 countries – ranging from Canada to Pakistan – that have blasphemy laws (as of June 2016).

Blasphemy laws are a global concern, present in all of the world’s regions. These laws, which punish expression or acts deemed blasphemous, defamatory of religions, or contemptuous of religion or religious symbols, figures, or feelings, have punishments ranging from fines to imprisonment and death. They also embolden vigilante groups who mete out their own extrajudicial “justice,” including killings, often with state impunity.

According to their proponents, blasphemy laws promote religious harmony and public order. Unfortunately, they do the opposite, often leading to instability and violence in countries around the world, with negative consequences for individuals, communities and nations. USCIRF believes that all human beings should be accorded dignity, respect, and freedom no matter their convictions, and the Commission affirms the right of private individuals and groups to peacefully oppose expression they consider to be blasphemous. However, while it is legitimate to speak out against blasphemy, the Commission maintains that government has no role in policing blasphemy and that laws against blasphemy are detrimental to religious freedom and related human rights and are deeply problematic because they:

- Violate international human rights standards;
- Often are vaguely worded, and few specify or limit the forum in which blasphemy can occur for purposes of punishment;
- Are inconsistent with the approach agreed to in UN Human Rights Council Resolution 16/18;
- Inappropriately make governments the arbiters of ultimate truths or religious doctrines;
- Are used disproportionately against religious minorities or dissenting members of the majority community and are ripe for abuse;
- Often carry draconian penalties; and
- Embolden religious extremists to commit acts of violence.

USCIRF urges the repeal of blasphemy laws worldwide. We must continue to confront blasphemy laws and the horrific acts they unleash as an assault on human rights and dignity and press offending nations to repeal these laws, protect those who have been accused, and release people arrested, charged, imprisoned, and sentenced to death for blasphemy.

The Commission believes that when discussing blasphemy, it is important to focus on the *real people* impacted, and not just the laws themselves. The individuals highlighted here are only a sample of those who have been negatively impacted by blasphemy laws. For some we have pictures, but for many we do not. Read their stories, the charges against them, and their sentences to better understand the devastating impact of these laws and the need for repeal.

EGYPT**MOHAMED ABDULLAH AL-NASR**

RELIGION	CHARGES	SENTENCING DATE	SENTENCE
Sunni Muslim	Contempt of religion (Article 98 (F) Egyptian Penal Code)	February 2017	5 years' imprisonment
SUMMARY			
In February 2017, Sunni Muslim cleric Mohamed Abdullah al-Nasr was sentenced to five years in prison for "contempt of religion" for questioning various interpretations of Qur'anic texts on Facebook; he remains in prison while an appeal is pending. In November 2016, al-Nasr also had claimed to be the Mahdi, a promised eschatological figure within Islam, prompting calls for his prosecution and a psychiatric evaluation. Al-Nasr reportedly began a hunger strike February 26, 2017 to protest his imprisonment. ¹			

No Photo Available

MUSTAFA ABDEL-NABI

RELIGION	CHARGES	SENTENCING DATE	SENTENCE
Atheist	Contempt of religion (Article 98 (F) Egyptian Penal Code)	Initial: January 2016; Appeal Upheld: February 23, 2016	3 years' imprisonment (in absentia)
SUMMARY			
In January 2016, online activist Mustafa Abdel-Nabi was convicted in absentia to three years in prison for blasphemy for postings about atheism on his Facebook page. His sentence was upheld on February 23, 2016, by the Edku Misdemeanor Court.			

EGYPT

No Photo Available	GAD YOUSEF YOUNAN			
RELIGION	DETAINED SINCE	CHARGES	SENTENCING DATE	SENTENCE
Coptic Christian	April 7, 2015	Contempt of religion (Article 98 (F) Egyptian Penal Code)	December 2015	3 years' imprisonment (Released on bail pending appeal)
SUMMARY				
Gad Yousef Younan, an Egyptian teacher at a Coptic Christian school, was arrested and charged on April 7, 2015 with "contempt of religion", along with four of his students, because he filmed a short private video in which four of his students mocked ISIS. Younan was sentenced to three years in prison in December 2015, and he and his family were expelled from his village after a "reconciliation session" with local authorities. Younan was released on bail pending the appeal of his case. In 2015, his four students were sentenced to five years in prison in a separate trial. In April 2016, the four students fled Egypt and reportedly are seeking asylum in Switzerland.				

INDONESIA

	ANDRY CAHYA			
RELIGION	DETAINED SINCE	CHARGES	SENTENCING DATE	SENTENCE
Gafatar follower (also known as Millah Abraham)	May 25, 2016	Blasphemy (Article 156(a), Indonesian Criminal Code)	March 7, 2017	3 years' imprisonment
SUMMARY				
Andry Cahya, along with his father Ahmad Musadeq and Mahful Muis Tumanurung (see below), are leaders of the banned spiritual movement Gafatar. He currently is serving a three-year sentence for blasphemy; the court acquitted him of "rebellion" charges under Articles 107 and 110 of the Criminal Code. Mr. Tumanurung and Mr. Musadeq previously had been convicted of blasphemy in 2006 for establishing the Al-Qiyadah al-Islamiyah movement. After their release, they formed the Gafatar spiritual movement in 2012, which the government disbanded for deviating from Islam in 2015 after the country's top Muslim clerical body issued a fatwa pronouncing Gafatar heretical. ²				

INDONESIA

 No Photo Available	SANDY HARTONO				
CHARGES	SENTENCING DATE	SENTENCE			
Transmitting religiously defamatory material over the Internet (Article 28(2), Electronic Information and Transactions Law)	September 20, 2011	6 years' imprisonment and a 500 million rupiah fine			
SUMMARY					
Sandy Hartono was convicted of disseminating religiously defamatory material over the Internet under Article 28(2) of Indonesia's Electronic Information and Transactions Law. These charges arose from Mr. Hartono's Facebook posts that allegedly slandered Islam and the Prophet Muhammed. In 2011, an Indonesian court sentenced him to six years in prison.					

	AHMAD MUSADEQ			
RELIGION	DETAINED SINCE	CHARGES	SENTENCING DATE	SENTENCE
Gafatar follower (also known as Millah Abraham)	May 25, 2016	Blasphemy (Article 156a, Indonesian Criminal Code)	March 7, 2017	5 years' imprisonment
SUMMARY				
Ahmad Musadeq, along with his son, Andry Cahya (see above), and Mahful Muis Tumanurung (see below), are leaders of the banned spiritual movement Gafatar. He currently is serving a five-year prison sentence for blasphemy; the court acquitted him of "rebellion" charges under Articles 107 and 110 of the Criminal Code. Mr. Tumanurung and Mr. Musadeq previously had been convicted of blasphemy in 2006 for establishing the Al-Qiyadah al-Islamiyah movement. After their release, they formed the Gafatar spiritual movement in 2012, which the government disbanded for deviating from Islam in 2015 after the country's top Muslim clerical body issued a fatwa pronouncing Gafatar heretical. ³				

INDONESIA



SEBASTIAN JOE

RELIGION	DETAINED SINCE	CHARGES	SENTENCING DATE	SENTENCE
Muslim	July 3, 2012	Initial: Blasphemy (Article 156(a), Indonesian Criminal Code); Second: Disseminating information aimed at inciting religious hatred or hostility (Article 28(2), Electronic Information and Transactions Law)	Initial: November 2012; Second: January 2013	Initial: 4 years' Imprisonment; Second: 1-year imprisonment

SUMMARY

Sebastian Joe was convicted of blasphemy under Article 156(a) of the Indonesian Criminal Code for Facebook posts that some Muslim hardliners from the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) considered to insult Islam. The Ciamis District Court sentenced Sebastian Joe to four years in prison in November 2012. In 2013, the Bandung High Court convicted him of violating Article 28(2) of Indonesia's Electronic Information and Transactions Law prohibiting the transmission of material deemed religiously defamatory over the Internet, sentencing Sebastian Joe to an additional year in prison.⁴



BASUKI "AHOK" TJAHAJA PURNAMA

RELIGION	CHARGES	SENTENCING DATE	SENTENCE
Christian	Blasphemy (Article 156(a), Indonesian Criminal Code)	May 9, 2017	2 years' imprisonment

SUMMARY

The blasphemy charges brought against Ahok stemmed from a September 2016 speech in which he encouraged voters not to be dissuaded from voting for him in the February 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election because the Qur'an tells Muslims not to align with Christians or Jews. Ahok, who is a Christian of Chinese descent, later apologized for his remarks. Muslim hardliners, such as the Indonesian Council of Ulema and the Islamic Defenders Front, called on the authorities to arrest or imprison Ahok, or even sentence him to death. Many upset by the speech viewed a video recording online containing a caption which edited Ahok's remarks to suggest he insulted the Qur'an and Islam rather than his political opponents. After losing the second-round election, Ahok was found guilty of blasphemy on May 9, 2017, and sentenced to two years' imprisonment, a harsher sentence than what the prosecutors had requested. On May 23, 2017, Ahok dropped his appeal, though at the time of writing, an appeal filed by prosecutors is still pending.⁵

INDONESIA



MAHFUL MUIS TUMANURUNG

RELIGION	DETAINED SINCE	CHARGES	SENTENCING DATE	SENTENCE
Gafatar follower (also known as Millah Abraham)	May 25, 2016	Blasphemy (Article 156a, Indonesian Criminal Code)	March 7, 2017	5 years' imprisonment
SUMMARY				
<p>Mahful Muis Tumanurung, along with Ahmad Musadeq and his son Andry Cahya (see above), are leaders of the banned spiritual Gafatar. He currently is serving a five-year prison sentence for blasphemy; the court acquitted him of “rebellion” charges under Articles 107 and 100 of the Criminal Code. Mr. Tumanurung and Mr. Musadeq previously had been convicted of blasphemy in 2006 for establishing the Al-Qiyadah al-Islamiyah movement. After their release, they formed the Gafatar spiritual movement in 2012, which the government disbanded for deviating from Islam in 2015 after the country’s top Muslim clerical body issued a <i>fatwa</i> pronouncing Gafatar heretical.⁶</p>				

IRAN



AYATOLLAH MOHAMMAD KAZEMEINI BOROUJERDI

RELIGION	DETAINED SINCE	CHARGES	SENTENCING DATE	SENTENCE
Shi'a Muslim	October 7, 2006	30 charges, including enmity against God and national security; delivering speeches and provoking public opinions against the government; calling Velayat-e-Faqih illegitimate; accusing the revolution's founder and leader of innovating in religion and lying; having relationships with famous personalities opposed to the revolution; accusing high ranking government officials of neglecting people's rights and requests; using the term "religious dictatorship" instead of "Islamic Republic" in interviews with foreign television and radio stations; fabricating a new religion; abusing his clergy frock	June 10, 2007	Initial Sentence: Death (shortened to 11 years' imprisonment on appeal)

SUMMARY

Despite being an adherent of the dominant form of Islam in Iran, Ayatollah Mohammad Kazemeini Boroujerdi repeatedly drew the Iranian government's ire for his advocacy of the separation of religion and state. He also had spoken out on behalf of the rights of Iran's religious minorities and the Shi'a Muslim majority. A special court tried him (and 17 of his followers) and sentenced him to death on spurious charges, including "enmity against God" and spreading propaganda against the regime. After an appeal, the death sentence was revoked and he was sentenced to eleven years in prison. Given the poor prison conditions, torture, and a lack of adequate medical treatment, his health has deteriorated. He suffers from heart and respiratory problems, kidney stone complications, and a loss of 80 percent of his vision due to cataracts.⁷

Status: Under house arrest.

IRAN**MOHAMMAD ALI TAHERI**

RELIGION	DETAINED SINCE	CHARGES	SENTENCING DATE	SENTENCE
Erfan-e Halgheh (Iranian mysticism)	May 4, 2011	<p>Initial: insulting religious sanctities; immoral contact with women; interfering in medical science; earning illegitimate funds; distributing audio-visual products and use of academic titles;</p> <p>Second: spreading corruption on earth; establishing a diversionary cult;</p> <p>Third: spreading corruption on earth; engaging in medical practices; membership in the banned People's Fadai Guerrilla Organization of Iran (PFGOI)</p>	<p>Initial: October 30, 2011;</p> <p>Subsequent: July 2015</p>	<p>Initial: 5 years' imprisonment; 74 lashes; 900 million Toman fine (\$300,000 USD equivalent);</p> <p>Subsequent: Death (which was overturned)</p>
SUMMARY				
<p>Mohammad Ali Taheri is an Iranian researcher and the founder of a spiritual movement that promotes alternative medical theories. He was first arrested in 2010 on charges of "acting against national security" and was held in solitary confinement for over three months. He was arrested again in May 2011 and eventually sentenced to five years in prison for blasphemy, 74 lashes for touching the wrists of female patients, and 900 million Toman (approximately \$300,000) for "interfering in medical science," "earning illegitimate funds," and "distribution of audio-visual products and use of academic titles." After completing his five-year sentence and paying the fine, he unexpectedly was charged with "corruption on earth" for publishing several books on spirituality and sentenced to death in August 2015, a decision that the Iranian Supreme Court overturned. Despite the Supreme Court ruling and Taheri's completion of his five-year prison term, he remains detained, and additional charges, including "spreading corruption on earth", have been brought against him.⁸</p> <p>Status update: In August 2017, Taheri was once more sentenced to death following a third trial on charges of "spreading corruption on earth." Taheri's attorney announced his intention to appeal the ruling to the Supreme Court.</p>				

PAKISTAN

No Photo Available

IDREES AHMAD

RELIGION	DETAINED SINCE	CHARGES	SENTENCING DATE	SENTENCE
Ahmadi	December 5, 2016	Four counts, under Pakistan Penal Code 298-B and 298-C, and Section 9 and 11-W of Anti-Terrorism Act	May 31, 2017	Three years' rigorous imprisonment and fine of 50,000 rupees

SUMMARY

Idrees Ahmad, an employee of the Ahmadiyya community's central offices and the Zia ul Islam Printing Press in Rabwah, was arrested and charged under Pakistan's Penal Code and Anti-Terrorism Act. On December 5, 2016, the Punjab province's Counter Terrorism Department raided the offices on suspicions that the offices were producing Ahmadiyya publications for distribution. During the raid police reportedly beat Ahmad and several others, including Saba-ul-Zafar (see below).

No Photo Available

JAFFAR ALI

RELIGION	DETAINED SINCE	CHARGES	SENTENCING DATE	SENTENCE
Muslim	May 19, 2015	Blasphemy (Section 295-C and 386, Pakistani Penal Code); Extortion	June 27, 2016	Death plus 35 years; 8,000,000 rupee fine (About \$76,000 USD) (reports vary on the amount of the fine levied).

SUMMARY

Jaffar Ali and Javed Naz (see below) former employees of Locus Science School, located in Gujranwala, Punjab province, who had been fired for allegedly leaking the contents of exams to students, allegedly attempted to blackmail the school's principal, Anjum Naz Sindhu (see below), using a recording of supposedly blasphemous remarks made by Sindhu during a speech at the school. Sindhu notified authorities that he was being blackmailed, and the police arrested Ali and Naz for handling the blasphemous recordings on their phones. The cases are under appeal with the Punjab Province High Court.

PAKISTAN

No Photo Available

MUHAMMAD ALI

RELIGION	DETAINED SINCE	CHARGES	SENTENCING DATE
Muslim	October 14, 2016	Defiling of Holy Qur'an (295-B, Pakistani Penal Code)	Not yet adjudicated.

SUMMARY

Muhammad Ali, a seminary student, and his teacher Qari Mumtaz (see below), were arrested in the Kasur district, Punjab Province on charges of defiling the Qur'an, after neighbors reported that Ali was burning pages of the Qur'an. When confronted by a neighbor, Ali claimed Mumtaz had taught him that burning the pages of the Qur'an and then burying them was an acceptable way to dispose of old Qur'ans. Applications to be released on bail until trial have been denied.



AASIA BIBI

RELIGION	DETAINED SINCE	CHARGES	SENTENCING DATE	SENTENCE
Roman Catholic	June 14, 2009	Blasphemy (Section 295-C, Pakistani Penal Code)	November 2010	Death and fine

SUMMARY

After getting into a dispute with fellow farmhands in 2009, Aasia Bibi was accused of blasphemy. In November 2010, a judge sentenced her to death by hanging and to pay a fine of roughly \$1,000. In October 2015, she was placed in isolation reportedly for her own safety, as other prisoners convicted of blasphemy had been killed while in prison. After a series of unsuccessful appeals and public outcry from the international community and high-profile figures in Pakistan, the Supreme Court suspended the death sentence pending appeal. In October 2016, the Pakistani Supreme Court delayed Ms. Bibi's final appeal hearing after a judge recused himself; she remains imprisoned and the hearing has not yet been rescheduled.⁹

PAKISTAN

No Photo Available

NABEEL CHOCHAN

RELIGION	DETAINED SINCE	CHARGES	SENTENCING DATE
Christian	September 18, 2016	Blasphemy (Section 295/295-A, Pakistani Penal Code)	Not yet adjudicated.

SUMMARY

In September 2016 in Punjab province, a Christian, Nabeel Chohan, was arrested for “liking” and sharing an allegedly derogatory photo of the Kaaba on Facebook. Authorities also allege he stored the picture on his phone. He was arrested after a Muslim friend of one of Chohan’s Facebook friends reported the image to the police. Chohan’s lawyer claims Chohan is illiterate, and that the social media account was created by his Muslim friends for ulterior motives. Chohan’s arrest caused other Christians to flee the area. He has been denied bail.

No Photo Available

NADEEM JAMES

RELIGION	DETAINED SINCE	CHARGES	SENTENCING DATE
Christian	July 10, 2016	Blasphemy (Section 295-C, Section 298-A, Pakistani Penal Code)	Not yet adjudicated.

SUMMARY

On July 10, 2016, Nadeem James, a Christian man, was arrested in Gujrat, Punjab province—after intense community pressure—for sending so-called blasphemous messages on the social networking app WhatsApp. He initially fled his family home in an effort to avoid arrest. However, police took a number of James’ female relatives into “protective custody”, during which their family claims they were beaten in an effort to force James to appear. The case caused many Christians to flee the area for fear of attacks by the community. Eventually, James was arrested and he was charged with blasphemy. His case is pending in a Punjab province lower court.

PAKISTAN

No Photo Available

QARI MUMTAZ

RELIGION	DETAINED SINCE	CHARGES	SENTENCING DATE
Muslim	October 14, 2016	Defiling of Holy Qur'an (Section 295-B, Pakistani Penal Code)	Not yet adjudicated.
SUMMARY			
Teacher Qari Mumtaz, along with his 16-year old seminary student, Muhammad Ali (see above), was arrested in Kasur district, Punjab province on charges of defiling the Qur'an, after neighbors reported that Ali was burning pages of the Qur'an. When confronted by a neighbor, Ali claimed Mumtaz had taught him that burning the pages of the Qur'an and then burying them was an acceptable way to dispose of old Qur'ans. Applications to be released on bail until trial have been denied.			

No Photo Available

JAVED NAZ

RELIGION	DETAINED SINCE	CHARGES	SENTENCING DATE	SENTENCE
Catholic	May 19, 2015	Blasphemy (Section 295-C and 386, Pakistani Penal Code); Extortion	June 27, 2016	Death plus 35 years; 8,000,000 rupee fine (about \$76,000 USD) (reports vary on the amount of the fine levied)
SUMMARY				
Javed Naz and Jaffar Ali (see above), former employees of Locus Science School, located in Gujranwala, Punjab province, had been fired allegedly for leaking the contents of exams to students. They reportedly attempted to blackmail the school's principal, Anjum Naz Sindhu (see below), using a recording of supposedly blasphemous remarks Sindhu made during a speech at the school. Sindhu notified authorities that he was being blackmailed, and the police arrested Ali and Naz for handling the blasphemous recordings on their phones. The cases are under appeal with the Punjab Province High Court.				

PAKISTAN



ABDUL SHAKOOR

RELIGION	DETAINED SINCE	CHARGES	SENTENCING DATE	SENTENCE
Ahmadi	December 2, 2015	Blasphemy and stirring sectarian hatred (298-C, Pakistani Penal Code and clauses 8 through 11, Anti-Anti-Terrorism Act of 1997)	January 2, 2016	5 years' imprisonment for blasphemy charges; 3 years' imprisonment on terrorism charges

SUMMARY

Abdul Shakoor, an 80-year old optician and store owner in Rabwah, Punjab Province, was detained for propagating the Ahmadiyya faith by selling copies of the Qur'an and Ahmadiyya publications. His store manager, Mazhar Sipra, was also charged with violating 298-C and clauses 8 through 11 of the Anti-Terrorism Act. While Sipra was acquitted of the blasphemy charges, Shakoor was given a 5-year sentence under the Anti-Terrorism Act. Both men have filed appeals.¹⁰

No Photo Available

ANJUM NAZ SINDHU

RELIGION	DETAINED SINCE	CHARGES	SENTENCING DATE	SENTENCE
Catholic	May 19, 2015	Blasphemy (Section 295-C, 153-A, Pakistani Penal Code)	June 27, 2016	Death; 500,000 rupee fine (about \$4,800 USD)

SUMMARY

Anjum Naz Sindhu, owner of a chain of schools in Gujranwala and a Christian, gave a speech at Locus Science School in which he allegedly committed blasphemy. A school employee, Javed Naz (see above), attended the speech and reportedly kept a record of what Sindhu said in order to blackmail him. After Naz was fired by Sindhu for allegedly leaking the content of exams to students, he and Jaffar Ali (see above), a Muslim and friend of Naz, allegedly attempted to blackmail Sindhu using the purported recording. Sindhu notified the police of the blackmail attempt. Subsequently, all three men were apprehended for alleged blasphemy. All eleven witnesses in the case were police officers, rather than students or other faculty members who were present at the speech, and there was no direct evidence presented against Sindhu.

PAKISTAN**SABA-UL-ZAFAR**

RELIGION	DETAINED SINCE	CHARGES	SENTENCING DATE	SENTENCE
Ahmadi	December 5, 2016	Four counts, under Pakistan Penal Code 298-B and 298-C, and Section 9 and 11-W of Anti-Terrorism Act	May 31, 2017	Three years' rigorous imprisonment and fine of 50,000 rupees
SUMMARY				
Saba-ul-Zafar, an employee of the Ahmadiyya community's central offices and the Zia ul Islam Printing Press in Rabwah, was arrested and charged under Pakistan's Penal Code and Anti-Terrorism Act. On December 5, 2016, the Punjab province's Counter Terrorism Department raided the offices on suspicions that the offices were producing Ahmaddiyya publications for distribution. During the raid police reportedly beat ul-Zafar and several others, including Idrees Ahmad (see above).				

RUSSIAN FEDERATION



RUSLAN SOKOLOVSKY

RELIGION	CHARGES	SENTENCING DATE	SENTENCE
Atheist	Incitement of Hatred or Enmity, as well as Abasement of Human Dignity (Article 282); Public actions expressing clear disrespect to society with the aim to insult religious feelings of believers committed in places for religious worship (Article 148.1); Illegal possession of equipment for the secret acquisition of information (Article 138.1)	May 11, 2017	3.5-year suspended sentence
SUMMARY			
Ruslan Sokolovsky is a young blogger and law student from central Russia. On August 11, 2016, Sokolovsky posted a video on YouTube in which he played the popular mobile game Pokémon Go in one of the biggest churches in Yekaterinburg. On September 2, police arrested him on charges of inciting hatred and offending religious sensibilities under Article 282 and Article 148.2 of the Russian Criminal Code. A judge ruled that Sokolovsky remain under house arrest while awaiting trial, but he was later jailed after receiving an unauthorized visit from his fiancée. While in jail he was placed on two "watch lists," one for suicide and the other for "extremism." In February, he was again released to house arrest. On May 11, 2017, Sokolovsky received a three-and-a-half year suspended sentence. ¹¹			

SAUDI ARABIA



RAIF BADAWI

RELIGION	DETAINED SINCE	CHARGES	SENTENCING DATE	SENTENCE
Muslim	June 7, 2012	Initial: Insulting Islam through electronic channels; Apostasy; Setting up a website that undermines general security; Ridiculing religious figures; Going beyond the realm of obedience; Founding of an Internet forum that violates Islamic values and propagates liberal thought	Initial: July 30, 2013; Increase: May 7, 2014;	Initial: 7 years' imprisonment and 600 lashes; On Appeal: 10 years imprisonment, 1,000 lashes, and 1 million riyal fine (about \$266,000 USD)
SUMMARY				
<p>Raif Badawi is a blogger and activist who was arrested in June 2012 on the charge of insulting Islam through electronic channels. On July 30, 2013, the Jeddah Criminal Court sentenced Badawi to seven years in prison and 600 lashes for founding an Internet forum that "violates Islamic values and propagates liberal thought." On May 7, 2014, an appeals court increased the punishment to 10 years in prison, 1000 lashes, and a fine of 1 million riyals (about \$266,000 USD). He also was banned from any media work or foreign travel for 10 years after his release from prison. The sentence called for Badawi to be lashed 50 times a week for 20 consecutive weeks. Immediately after the first set of 50 lashes was carried out in January 2016, numerous human rights groups and several governmental entities, including USCIRF, condemned the lashing. Badawi has not received additional lashings, reportedly due to international outrage and a medical doctor's finding that he could not physically endure more lashings. However, Badawi's family believes that the lashings could resume at any time.¹²</p>				

SAUDI ARABIA



ASHRAF FAYADH

RELIGION	DETAINED SINCE	CHARGES	SENTENCING DATE	SENTENCE
Muslim	January 1, 2014	Apostasy; Blaspheming the divine self; Blaspheming the Prophet Muhammad; Promotion of Atheism; Refutation of the Qu'ran; Denial of the day of resurrection; Inappropriate relations with the other gender	Initial: May 26, 2014; Retrial: November 17, 2015; Appellate Decrease: February 2016	Initial: Four years' imprisonment and 800 lashes; Retrial: Death; Appellate Decrease: 8 years' imprisonment; 800 lashes

SUMMARY

Ashraf Fayadh is a Saudi poet and artist who in November 2015 was sentenced to death for apostasy for allegedly questioning religion and spreading atheist thought in his poetry. In February 2016, an appeals court quashed the death sentence and issued a new verdict of eight years in prison and 800 lashes to be administered on 16 occasions, which have not yet been administered. According to his lawyer, Fayadh also must renounce his poetry in Saudi state media.¹³



SHANKAR PONNAM

RELIGION	DETAINED SINCE	CHARGES	SENTENCING DATE	SENTENCE
Hindu	November 21, 2016	Blasphemy; Offending religious sentiments	January 25, 2017	Four months' imprisonment; 5,000 Saudi Riyal (\$1,350 USD) fine

SUMMARY

Shankar Ponnam is an Indian agricultural engineer who posted on social media a Photoshopped image of the Hindu deity Shiva sitting atop the Kaaba, the holiest site in Islam. A group of Indian Muslims filmed themselves beating Ponnam and posted the video on social media. Ponnam was arrested at a farm near Riyadh on charges of blasphemy. On January 25, 2017, he reportedly was sentenced to four months in prison and a fine of 5,000 Saudi riyals (approximately \$1,350).¹⁴

ENDNOTES

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Source: Ashraf Fayadh/Instagram
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