

## Oral Testimony

### USCIRF Hearing on FoRB Violations Against Christians in Pakistan

Respected Chair, Vice Chair, and Honorable Commissioners,

Thank you for inviting me to testify today on freedom of religion or belief violations against Christians in Pakistan. I appear before you as a human rights lawyer and legal practitioner with direct experience documenting religious persecution cases and systemic legal abuse in Pakistan.

Freedom of religion or belief in Pakistan remains under serious strain in 2024 and 2025. While the Constitution formally guarantees religious freedom, the legal and institutional reality for Christians tells a very different story.

Christians constitute approximately 1.3 percent of Pakistan's population, according to the 2023 national census. Yet they are excessively targeted through the misuse of criminal law, most notably blasphemy provisions, and through social and mob violence that operates with near-total impunity.

Pakistan's blasphemy laws, particularly Section 295-C of the Penal Code, which mandates the death penalty, are routinely weaponized. These laws require no proof of intent, allow arrests on the basis of accusation alone, and expose the accused to immediate risk of mob violence.

In 2024 alone, at least 344 new blasphemy cases were recorded. While Muslims also face accusations, Christians and other minorities face uniquely severe consequences, including prolonged pre-trial detention, social exile, and violent retaliation even after acquittal.

A National Commission for Human Rights report confirms the rise of organized false accusations, often coordinated through social media and linked to extortion networks commonly referred to as the "blasphemy business group."

In July 2025, Pakistan's Islamabad High Court ordered an investigation into these networks, only for the order to be suspended weeks later, effectively blocking accountability.

Let me illustrate the human cost.

Christians are lynched, burned alive, or murdered, even while in police custody under the pretext of religion, yet no one is held responsible for these killings. Shama, a pregnant woman, and her husband Shahzad were lynched and burned alive in a brick kiln following blasphemy allegations, with complete impunity for the perpetrators.

In August 2025, police in Lahore arrested Nadeem Masih, a 49-year-old blind Christian man, on blasphemy charges punishable by death, following a false accusation. His disability did not protect him. His faith did not protect him. The mere allegation was enough to put his life at risk.

Blasphemy accusations also intersect with forced conversions and child marriage. Christian girls are abducted, coerced into conversion, and married to their abductors, often with courts legitimizing these acts despite clear violations of domestic and international law.

Between 2021 and 2024, at least 137 Christian girls were documented as victims of forced conversion and forced marriage. Most were minors. In 2025 alone, cases such as 13-year-old Maria Shahbaz in Lahore demonstrate how courts continue to fail Christian children.

The result is a climate where:

Accusation equals guilt. Due process collapses under religious pressure. Victims are punished, not protected. Pakistan is a State Party to the ICCPR, yet these practices violate the right to life, freedom of religion, fair trial guarantees, and child protection norms.

My full written submission, which I respectfully submit for the record, provides detailed legal analysis, statistics, and documented cases.

I urge USCIRF to:

Continue designating Pakistan as a Country of Particular Concern  
Press for suspension and reform of blasphemy laws  
Demand accountability for false accusers and mob violence  
Prioritize protection for Christian victims, especially women and children

Thank you for your attention and for your continued leadership on international religious freedom.

By,

Aneeqa Maria  
Human Rights Lawyer and Defender