

The Rt. Hon. Azam Nazeer Tarar
Federal Minister of Law and Justice
Ministry of Law and Justice
Blocks S & R Pakistan Secretariat
Islamabad
Pakistan
June 08, 2023

Christian Solidarity International (CSI)

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Dear Mr. Tarar,

I write to request you to drop the charge of blasphemy - a capital offense under Article 295-C of the Pakistan Penal Code - against Noman Masih son of Asghar Masih, born on October 15, 2000 and Sunny Waqas son of Mushtaq Masih, born on March 17, 1999. Noman has been languishing on death row in Bahawalpur Jail for close to four years while Sunny Waqas has been out on bail since February 2023.

Noman Masih was convicted by Muhammad Hafeez-Ur-Rehman Khan, Additional Sessions Judge, Bahawalpur, under the said section and sentenced to death. The judgment was announced on May 30, 2023 on the basis of First Information Report No. 366/19 dated July 1, 2019, issued at the Baghdad-UI-Jadeed police station, Bahawalpur. An appeal to set aside the judgment of the court was submitted on June 2, 2023 to the Lahore High Court Bahawalpur Bench.

Noman Masih is also facing trial alongside his cousin **Sunny Waqas** on the same charges in connection with First Information Report No: 353/19 logged on June 29, 2019 at Faqeerwali police station, Haroonabad tehsil, Bahawalnagar district. Sunny Waqas was granted bail in February 2023.

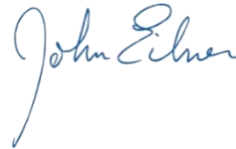
According to a General Comment by the UN Human Rights Committee on July 28, 2011, "Prohibitions of displays of lack of respect for a religion or other belief system, including blasphemy laws, are incompatible with the covenant [i.e. the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights]." Pakistan has ratified this legally binding international covenant.

The UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Mr. Ahmed Shaheed, has called for the repeal of blasphemy laws, noting that they often serve to further religious intolerance against vulnerable religious minorities.

As a Board Member of the Justice Project Pakistan (JPP) you will be aware of its 2015 report *A "Most Serious Crime": Pakistan's Unlawful Use of the Death Penalty*. As the title of the JPP report suggests, it strongly condemns an entrenched pattern of injustice in Pakistan's legal system regarding blasphemy and other capital punishment cases.

Trusting that you will act in the interest of justice and religious tolerance for Noman Masih and Sunny Waqas, I furthermore request you to please provide guarantees for the safety of Noman Masih and Sunny Waqas upon their release from prison, given the strong possibility of religious extremists committing acts of violence against them because of the allegation of blasphemy.

Most Respectfully

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "John Eibner". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J'.

John Eibner, Ph.D (London)
International President