

Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada

NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations

Promoting human rights by protecting those who defend them

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Monday, May 1, 2017

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Dear President, Prime Minister and Chief Minister:

Re: Murder of Lawyer Saleem Latif & Duty to Protect Freedom of Religion

Lawyers Rights' Watch Canada (LRWC) is a committee of lawyers and others who promote human rights and the rule of law internationally by protecting advocacy rights. LRWC campaigns for advocates in danger because of their human rights advocacy, engages in research and education and works in cooperation with other human rights organizations. LRWC has Special Consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.

LRWC strongly condemns the targeted killing of prominent Ahmadi community leader and lawyer Saleem Latif, gunned down on his way to court on the morning of 30 March 2017 in Nakana Sahib.

Background

Saleem Latif, lawyer and local community leader of Jamaat -e- Ahmadi, was gunned down on 30 March 2017 while traveling to court by motorbike. He was with his son Malik Farhan, also a lawyer, who luckily escaped the attack unharmed. Saleem Latif was the cousin of Abdul Salam, a Pakistani Nobel laureate. The banned militant group Lashkhar -e- Jhangui claimed responsibility

for the attack. Spokesman for Lashkhar -e- Jhangui Ali Bin Sufyan stated that “Saleem Latif was killed for adhering to the beliefs of the Ahmadi sect.”¹

Muhammad Rashid, arrested shortly after the attack, confessed to police for killing Saleem Latif, and stated he killed Saleem Latif for his religious beliefs.² Muhammad Rashid, a security guard at a gold ornament store, was known for harassing minorities. A few weeks prior to the murder, he had insulted a family and had asked them to leave when they visited the store.³ As of the date of this letter, his arrest has not been put down on record as police are said to be still interrogating him for information about his accomplices.⁴

The murder of Saleem Latif has been met by outrage by the Ahmadi community. According to Saleem Uddin, a spokesman for the community, “threats against Ahmadis are common in the area and Latif was a prominent member of the community and a well-known lawyer.”⁵ He also stated that Ahmadis are often targeted by mainstream Muslims and are often charged under Pakistan’s blasphemy laws.⁶ He said that “around 1,700 advertisements were published against the Ahmadiya community in local and national newspapers in 2016.”⁷ The discrimination, targeting, and harassment of Ahmadis are an ongoing problem in Pakistan, which in 1974 declared Ahmadis to be “non Muslims”. According to Saleem Latif’s son Malik Farhan, his family members have fled their home in Nakana Sahib, fearing another attack against them.⁸

Pakistan’s International and Domestic Law Obligations

Pakistan is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which specifically forbids discrimination based on religion and ethnicity and prohibits the use of coercion to impair the freedom to have or adopt a religion or belief of choice.

The ICCPR provides:

Article 18 (1) Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.

Article 18 (2) No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice.

Article 20 (2) Any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law.

Article 27 In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other

¹ *Suspected militants shot and killed lawyer Saleem Latif over blasphemy allegations*, ABC News, 30 March 2017. <http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/pakistan-suspected-militant-kills-lawyer-blasphemy-46466195>

² Rana Tanveer, *Advocate Latif murder case: Lawyers killer used to harass minority families*, The Express Tribune, 2 April 2017. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1371828/advocate-latif-murder-case-lawyers-killer-used-harass-minority-families/>

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Imran Gabol, *Cousin of Nobel Laureate Abdus Salam gunned down in Nankana Sahib*, The Dawn, 30 March 2017. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1323766>

⁶ Imtiaz Ahmad, *Pakistan: Ahmadi leader and cousin of Nobel laureate Abdus Salam gunned down*, Hindustan Times, 30 March 2017. <http://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/pakistan-ahmadi-community-leader-and-cousin-of-nobel-laureate-abdus-salam-gunned-down/story-sWti5rOZsPeLZYb8RrRZ4L.html>

⁷ *Supra* note 5.

⁸ *Supra* note 2.

members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion, or to use their own language.

Members of religious minorities groups in Pakistan are guaranteed protection and religious freedom by the *Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 1973, As Amended by the Constitution Twentieth Amendment Act, 2012*. Article 20(a) states that “[e]very citizen shall have the right to profess, practice and propagate his religion”.

Conclusion

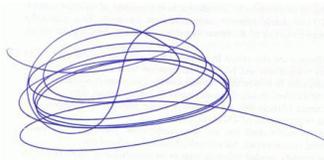
The rights of Ahmadis and other members of religious minorities to “profess, practice and propagate their religious beliefs” are violated by prosecutions under Pakistan’s draconian blasphemy laws, unchecked discrimination and widespread persecution. Saleem Latif was a prominent Ahmadi leader and lawyer brutally murdered for his religious beliefs. The Government of Pakistan must take immediate and effective action to prevent and punish discrimination and attacks based on religious belief, protect members of religious minorities at risk and promote religious tolerance and respect through education, legal reforms and public statements. The Government of Pakistan must take effective action to prevent and punish acts of vigilantism carried out against adherents of minority religions and ensure that religious minorities can practice their beliefs without fear.

LRWC calls on the Government of Pakistan to:

1. Take effective measures to comply with its international and domestic law obligations to protect freedoms of religious thought and belief for all people in Pakistan;
2. On an urgent priority basis, implement a program of free public education with the goal of promoting religious and ethnic tolerance and respect;
3. Publicly denounce discrimination and attacks against religious groups in Pakistan;
4. Publicly condemn religious intolerance and vigilantism as against the law and intolerable to Islam;
5. Protect religious minorities from persecution and discrimination;
6. Repeal the criminal blasphemy laws and bring criminal laws regarding freedom of thought conscience and religion into compliance with Pakistan’s international human rights obligations;
7. Take preventive measures to combat hateful rhetoric and violence against religious minorities in Pakistan, and hold those responsible for such actions accountable.
8. Ensure the prosecution and fair trial, in accordance with law, of those responsible for the killing of Saleem Latif; and
9. Announce official government condemnation of the murder of Saleem Latif;

Please advise LRWC of the actions that the Government of Pakistan is taking to protect religious minorities and to ensure justice of the targeted killing of Saleem Latif.

Sincerely,



Gail Davidson, Executive Director, LRWC

-and-

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Hanna Bokhari
LRWC Case Monitor for Pakistan

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