

**Submission to UN Human Rights Committee  
Regarding Examination of Pakistan under the ICCPR  
120th Session 3-28 July 2017**

**By Atheist Ireland, the Evangelical Alliance of Ireland,  
And the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community of Ireland**

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## **1. Introduction**

1.1 Atheist Ireland, the Evangelical Alliance of Ireland, and the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community of Ireland are united in a campaign for secularism and human rights. Despite our different world views, we agree that each person should be treated with respect, our right to hold our beliefs should be treated with respect, and States should treat us all equally before the law by remaining neutral between religious and nonreligious philosophical convictions.

1.2 Parts of our campaign are:

- We promote the fundamental human rights of freedom of conscience, religion and belief, equality before the law, and freedom from discrimination for all citizens.
- We promote these human rights within Irish society and political institutions, and at the United Nations and other international human rights regulatory bodies.

1.3 In support of these aims we are making this Submission to outline the failure of Pakistan to protect the human rights of Atheists, Christians, Ahmadiyya Muslims, Secularists and other minorities under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

## **2. Recommendations**

2.1 Repeal the blasphemy laws, and respect the right to freedom of expression about religious or nonreligious philosophical beliefs.

2.2 Release all prisoners who are detained or convicted based on the blasphemy laws.

2.3 Train the police to protect people who are in danger of mob violence, or who are victims of mob violence, including based on allegations of blasphemy or persecution of members of religious or nonreligious minorities.

2.4 Take legal action against people who incite violence against others, or engage in violence against others, including based on allegations of blasphemy or persecution of members of religious or nonreligious minorities.

2.5 Amend the Constitution to ensure that, in practice, all people have equality of treatment before the law, regardless of their religious or nonreligious philosophical beliefs or convictions.

2.6 Repeal those parts of the Penal Code that prevent religious and nonreligious minorities from the peaceful practise and promotion of their religious or nonreligious philosophical beliefs or convictions.

2.7 Remove Ahmadi literature, which is deemed as hate material, from the scope of anti-terrorism laws as outlined under the National Action Plan.

2.8 End the use of anti-terrorism laws against Ahmadis.

2.9 Immediately release and drop charges against Abdul Shakoor and all the men arrested during the raid on Rabwah.

2.10 Abolish the separate electoral list of Ahmadis, and ensure that all citizens have an equal right to vote, regardless of their religious or nonreligious philosophical beliefs. From current instruments:

- Remove the Separate List.
- Remove the requirement to object to a voter on the basis of khatme nabuwwat.
- Right to vote to be an absolute right without being linked to religion, race, etc.
- Repeal Section 7B and & 7C and place all voters on one voting list irrespective of their religious or nonreligious beliefs or convictions.

2.11 In official declarations and affidavits required from a Muslim for National Identity Cards and Passports, remove the requirement that the person declare that they are not Ahmadi.

2.12 Stop the proliferation of madrasas whose curricula incite hatred and that have been used as a platform for military training and recruitment by armed groups.

2.13 Introduce State secular education that respects equally the human rights of all children, families and teachers, regardless of religious or nonreligious philosophical beliefs or convictions.

2.14 Have schools teach about religions and beliefs in an objective, critical and pluralistic manner, without religiously biased content or indoctrination into any specific religious or nonreligious philosophical beliefs or convictions.

### **3. ICCPR Rights Not Guaranteed and Protected**

3.1 In its State Report to the Committee, Pakistan stated that:

“The Constitution of Pakistan guarantees fundamental rights for all its citizens irrespective of religion, race, caste, colour or creed.”

3.2 But the Pakistani Penal Code directly contradicts this statement. It does not guarantee and protect the rights guaranteed under the Covenant.

3.3 Indeed, the Pakistani Penal Code impairs the essence of the rights guaranteed under the Covenant, and it is not compatible with the Covenant.

3.4 This includes Covenant Rights under:

- Article 2 (Non-discrimination and Right to an Effective Remedy)
- Article 6 (Right to Life and the Protection of the State)
- Article 14 (Equality Before the Law)
- Article 17 (Right to Privacy)
- Article 18 (Freedom of Religion and Belief)
- Article 19 (Freedom of Expression)
- Article 20 (Prohibition of Inciting National, Racial or Religious Hatred)
- Article 21 (Right to Peaceful Assembly)
- Article 22 (Freedom of Association)
- Article 25 (Right to take part in Public Affairs and Service, to Vote and be Elected)

- Article 26 (Equality Before the Law: covers all laws in Pakistan, guarantees to all persons equal and effective legal protection against any religious discrimination)

3.5 Pakistan has failed to take positive measures to secure these human rights for Atheists, Christians, Ahmadiyya Muslims, Secularists, and other minorities, despite having ratified the treaty and agreeing to guarantee these rights to all within its territory.

3.6 Pakistan has failed to answer satisfactorily the specific questions that the Committee asked it in the list of issues about Freedom of religion, conscience and belief (Articles 2, 14, 18, 19 and 26).

3.7 Pakistan has said in its response to the list of issues:

“The Supreme Court has the power of judicial review and can declare any enacted law to be ultra vires the Constitution. Article 2 of the Constitution declares Islam to be the State religion; therefore, no law can be enacted by the Parliament which is repugnant to Islamic injunctions.”

3.8 This inevitably leads to breaches of the human rights guaranteed by the Covenant, in instances where Islamic injunctions are incompatible with the Covenant.

3.9 In a recent Article in Dawn, it was stated that the superior courts in Pakistan refuse to apply international conventions in the absence of corresponding domestic legislation. <sup>1</sup>

“This is a misconceived understanding of international law. Pakistan has clarified unequivocally at international fora that treaties do not require domestic legislation to take effect. For example, in March 2017, in its reply to a query by the UN Human Rights Committee regarding the enforceability of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Pakistan stated it became directly applicable upon ratification. However, superior courts refuse to apply international conventions in the absence of corresponding domestic legislation.”

### **3.10 General Comment on Article 18 – Freedom of religion and belief States that:**

“2. Article 18 protects theistic, non-theistic and atheistic beliefs, as well as the right not to profess any religion or belief. The terms “belief” and “religion” are to be broadly construed. Article 18 is not limited in its application to traditional religions or to religions and beliefs with institutional characteristics or practices analogous to those of traditional religions. The Committee therefore views with concern any tendency to discriminate against any religion or belief for any reason, including the fact that they are newly

established, or represent religious minorities that may be the subject of hostility on the part of a predominant religious community.”

“7. In accordance with article 20, no manifestation of religion or belief may amount to propaganda for war or advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence. As stated by the Committee in its general comment No. 11 [19], States parties are under the obligation to enact laws to prohibit such acts.”

3.11 Pakistan does not guarantee and protect the right to freedom of conscience for all citizens. In addition, there is no effective remedy to vindicate Covenant rights. Minorities are in fear of their life if they openly challenge the failure of Pakistan to protect their human rights.

3.12 Some minorities are put in a position that they must leave Pakistan because they are in fear of their life and persecution because of the failure of the State to protect and guarantee the rights guaranteed under the Covenant.

3.13 Protecting these rights requires changes to the Pakistani Constitution and laws, and a willingness by the Pakistani State to ensure the implementation of these rights without discrimination of any kind.

### **3.14 General Comment 31 on the ICCPR states that:**

“5. The article 2, paragraph 1, obligation to respect and ensure the rights recognised by the Covenant has immediate effect for all States parties. Article 2, paragraph 2, provides the overarching framework within which the rights specified in the Covenant are to be promoted and protected.”

“7. Article 2 requires that States Parties adopt legislative, judicial, administrative, educative and other appropriate measures in order to fulfil their legal obligations. The Committee believes that it is important to raise levels of awareness about the Covenant not only among public officials and State agents but also among the population at large.”

3.15 The Human Rights Watch World Report 2017 says of the the treatment of religious minorities in Pakistan in 2016: <sup>2</sup>

“At least 19 people remained on death row after being convicted under Pakistan’s draconian blasphemy law and hundreds awaited trial. Most of those facing blasphemy are

members of religious minorities, often victimised by these charges due to personal disputes.

The government continued to actively encourage legal and procedural discrimination against members of the Ahmadiyya religious community by failing to repeal discriminatory laws.

In March, at least 74 people were killed and 338 others injured in a suicide bombing in a public park in Lahore. The primary target of the attack was Christians celebrating Easter.”

#### **4. Blasphemy Laws and Related Violence**

4.1 Blasphemy laws breach Article 18 and Article 19 of the Covenant, and the Pakistani Blasphemy law also breaches Article 2, Article 6 and Article 26.

4.2 Pakistan has cited the existence of European blasphemy laws as part of its justification for this law. However, most of these laws are anachronistic and are not enforced.

4.3 The Irish blasphemy law of 2010 is more recent, and Pakistan has cited wording from this law at the United Nations on behalf of the the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation. However, the Irish Government has committed to holding a referendum that would enable repeal of the Irish blasphemy law.

4.4 The application of the death penalty for those convicted of blasphemy breaches Article 6 of the Covenant. The most globally prominent example, the ongoing case of Asia Bibi, a Christian woman awaiting execution for alleged blasphemy, remains an international scandal.

4.5 The Pakistani authorities have declared Ahmadi literature to be hate material under the National Action Plan.

4.6 Pakistan has a duty to ensure that minorities are protected from mob violence, and to ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice. However, to even get accused of blasphemy in Pakistan can mean mob violence, and the State fails in its positive obligation to protect the victims.

#### **4.7 General Comment on Article 19 (Freedom of Expression) states that:**

“48. Prohibitions of displays of lack of respect for a religion or other belief system, including blasphemy laws, are incompatible with the Covenant, except in the specific

circumstances envisaged in article 20, paragraph 2, of the Covenant. Such prohibitions must also comply with the strict requirements of article 19, paragraph 3, as well as such articles as 2, 5, 17, 18 and 26. Thus, for instance, it would be impermissible for any such laws to discriminate in favour of or against one or certain religions or belief systems, or their adherents over another, or religious believers over non-believers. Nor would it be permissible for such prohibitions to be used to prevent or punish criticism of religious leaders or commentary on religious doctrine and tenets of faith.”

#### **4.8 The Pakistani Penal Code says of blasphemy:**

##### **295-C. Use of derogatory remarks, etc., in respect of the Holy Prophet:**

Whoever by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representation or by any imputation, innuendo, or insinuation, directly or indirectly, defiles the sacred name of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) shall be punished with death, or imprisonment for life, and shall also be liable to fine.

##### **298-B. Misuse of epithets, descriptions and titles, etc., reserved for certain holy personages or places:**

(1) Any person of the Qadiani group or the Lahori group (who call themselves 'Ahmadis' or by any other name who by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representation,

(a) refers to or addresses, any person, other than a Caliph or companion of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), as "Ameer-ul-Mumineen", "Khalifatul-Mumineen", "Khalifa-tul-Muslimeen", "Sahaabi" or "Razi Allah Anho";

(b) refers to, or addresses, any person, other than a wife of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), as "Ummul-Mumineen";

(c) refers to, or addresses, any person, other than a member of the family "Ahle-bait" of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), as "Ahle-bait"; or

(d) refers to, or names, or calls, his place of worship a "Masjid";

shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to three years, and shall also be liable to fine.

(2) Any person of the Qadiani group or Lahori group (who call themselves "Ahmadis" or by any other name) who by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representation refers to the mode or form of call to prayers followed by his faith as "Azan", or recites

Azan as used by the Muslims, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to three years, and shall also be liable to fine.

Sec. 298-B ins. by the Anti-Islamic Activities of Qadiani Group, Lahori Group and Ahmadis (Prohibition and Punishment) Ordinance, XX of 1984

**298-C. Person of Qadiani group, etc., calling himself a Muslim or preaching or propagating his faith:**

Any person of the Qadiani group or the Lahori group (who call themselves 'Ahmadis' or by any other name), who directly or indirectly, poses himself as a Muslim, or calls, or refers to, his faith as Islam, or preaches or propagates his faith, or invites others to accept his faith, by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representations, or in any manner whatsoever outrages the religious feelings of Muslims shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to three years and shall also be liable to fine.

Sec. 298-C. ins. by the Anti-Islamic Activities of Qadiani Group, Lahori Group and Ahmadis (Prohibition and Punishment) Ordinance, XX of 1984.

4.9 This Penal Code is incompatible with the rights guaranteed under the Covenant.

4.10 The Pakistani Penal Code and the violations of human rights that flow from it enable the persecution of minorities in Pakistan. Instead of upholding human rights, Pakistan is helping to undermine them.

4.11 Pakistan has asked Facebook and Twitter to help identify Pakistanis suspected of blasphemy so it can prosecute them or pursue their extradition. <sup>3</sup>

4.12 The Pakistan Telecommunications Authority has a public notice telling people to report blasphemous content. It has sent this message to mobile phone users. <sup>4</sup>

4.13 Pakistan has said in its response to the list of issues that:

“Blasphemy Laws aim at ensuring public order and harmony in society, by seeking to prevent inter religious discord and incitement to violence, inter alia through hate speech.”



4.14 However, in practice, the opposite is the case. The existence of blasphemy laws create an incentive for people to seek to prevent people from exercising their rights to freedom of religion and expression, including through violence.

4.15 People are dying because of the failure of Pakistan to uphold the human rights that they signed up for when they ratified the Covenant.

4.16 The former Governor of Punjab, Salman Taseer, was shot dead at close range by his own bodyguard in Islamabad on 4 January 2011. The bodyguard, 26 year old Malik Mumtaz Qadri, is reported to have stated that he murdered Mr Taseer because of his interest in reforming the Blasphemy laws. What is of particular concern is that Khatme Nabuwwat lawyers had thrown rose petals and treated the assassin as a hero for defending the Blasphemy laws. Within this backdrop and climate of encouragement and laudatory treatment of such acts it does not seem plausible to reform the Blasphemy laws in the short-term.

4.17 The Dawn newspaper on 5 January 2011, reported on the day that Qadri was remanded by the Islamabad court: “A rowdy crowd slapped him on the back and kissed his cheek as he was escorted inside. The lawyers who tossed handfuls of rose petals over him were not involved in the case. As he left the court, a crowd of about 200 sympathisers chanted ‘death is acceptable for Muhammad’s slave.’ The suspect stood at the back door of an armoured vehicle police van with a flower necklace given to him by an admirer and repeatedly yelled God is great.” More than 500 clerics and scholars from the group Jamat Ahle Sunnat said no one should pray.

## **5. Freedom of Religion, Belief, and Privacy**

“In short, if you are an Ahmadi in Pakistan, you hide your religious identity.”<sup>5</sup>

5.1 In Pakistan the requirement to reveal your convictions means that minorities are put in a position where that revelation can lead to violence, discrimination and harassment by state agencies.

5.2 Anti-terror laws are being used solely against Ahmadis, by declaring their literature to be hate material under the National Action Plan. This has profound implications and is more far reaching than the Blasphemy Laws, as any Ahmadi can now be arrested without notice and without any recourse to bail. Ahmadis are the only religious community profiled under this legislation.

5.3 Legally speaking the Election Commission in Pakistan should prepare the electoral roll or voter list and verify it from the NADRA record. But in fact, local offices of election commission take the list from NADRA and publish it for information. The NADRA database has details of every person

including his/her religion. The electoral roll or voter list is prepared on the basis of the National Identity Card (NIC) through the NADRA database. A citizen of Pakistan has to apply for the NIC and details are kept on the NADRA Database.

5.4 The NADRA Database is used by the Election Commission to produce the voting list. All voters are placed into the General List irrespective of religion. However, an objection can be filed on the basis of the finality of Prophethood (KN). The voter then has to make a declaration of KN. If this is not done then such voter is put into the Separate List.

5.5 The reality is that the Separate List is just used for Ahmadis as the Election Commission automatically places Ahmadi voters from the NADRA Database into the Supplementary List. If Ahmadis want to vote they have to declare themselves as non-Muslims. This is a breach of Article 25 of the ICCPR.

5.6 This procedure is not followed for other minorities who are automatically placed into the General List. However, technically if an objection is raised they would be placed in the Separate List unless the declaration of KN is made.

5.7 Requiring persons to reveal their religious or non religious convictions in order to take part in public life is not in accordance with the Covenant.

5.8 If minorities reveal their convictions they then become a target for the authorities given the Penal Code on Blasphemy and the restrictions on Ahmadiyya Muslims.

5.9 There is no valid reason for the Pakistani authorities to require citizens to reveal their convictions if they are challenged while voting or in the education system. The lawful interference is not in accordance with the aims and objectives of the Covenant.

**5.10 General Comment 16 on Article 17 States that:**

“4. The expression “arbitrary interference” is also relevant to the protection of the right provided for in article 17. In the Committee’s view the expression “arbitrary interference” can also extend to interference provided for under the law. The introduction of the concept of arbitrariness is intended to guarantee that even interference provided for by law should be in accordance with the provisions, aims and objectives of the Covenant and should be, in any event, reasonable in the particular circumstances.”

**5.11 The Conduct of General Elections Order 2002 states that:**

9 [7B. Status of Ahmadis etc. to remain unchanged. Notwithstanding anything contained in the Electoral Rolls Act, 1974, (XXI of 1974), the Electoral Rolls, Rules, 1974, or any other law for the time being in force, including the Forms prescribed for preparation of electoral rolls on joint electorate basis in pursuance of Article 7 of the Conduct of General Elections Order, 2002 (Chief Executive's Order No. 7 of 2002), the status of Qadiani Group or the Lahori Group (who call themselves 'Ahmadis' or by any other name) or a person who does not believe in the absolute and unqualified finality of the Prophethood of Muhammad (peace be upon him), the last of the prophets or claimed or claims to be a Prophet, in any sense of the word or of any description whatsoever, after Muhammad (peace be upon him) or recognizes such a claimant as a Prophet or a religious reformer shall remain the same as provided in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 1973.

7C. If a person has got himself enrolled as voter and objection is filed before the Revising Authority notified under the Electoral Rolls Act, 1974, within ten days from issuance of the Conduct of General Elections (Second Amendment) Order, 2002, that such a voter is not a Muslim, the Revising Authority shall issue a notice to him to appear before it within fifteen days and require him to sign a declaration regarding his belief about the absolute and unqualified finality of the prophethood of Muhammad (peace be upon him) in Form-IV prescribed under the Electoral Rolls Rules, 1974. In case he refuses to sign the declaration as aforesaid, he shall be deemed to be a non Muslim and his name shall be deleted from the joint electoral rolls and added to a supplementary list of voters in the same electoral area as non Muslim. In case the voter does not turn up in spite of service of notice, an ex parte order may be passed against him”

## **6. Right to Life and the Protection of the State**

6.1 Pakistan has a duty to ensure that minorities are protected from mob violence, and to ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice. However, the State clearly fails in this duty.

6.2 Here are some reports of attacks that have taken place in Pakistan against Christians, Ahmadiyya Muslims, and Atheist and Secular Bloggers.

### **6(a) Examples of attacks against Christians**

Source: Report from Church in Chains, an Irish Voice for Persecuted Christians <sup>6</sup>

In recent years, Christians in the North West Frontier Province (bordering Afghanistan) have been ordered to leave the area, convert to Islam or face death. The deadliest attack on

Christians was the bombing of All Saints Church, Peshawar, in September 2013, killing 127 people.

In March 2015, 17 Christians were killed in suicide attacks on two churches in Lahore, capital of Punjab province. Another 80 were injured in the attacks, which were carried out by Taliban offshoot Jamaat-ul-Ahrar and took place during Sunday services in Youhanabad Colony, one of Pakistan's largest Christian colonies.

On Easter Sunday 2016, 72 people were killed in an anti-Christian suicide bomb attack in Lahore launched by Jamaat-ul-Ahrar. Over 370 people were injured. The terrorists were targeting Christian families who had gone to a park after Easter services in a nearby church. Those killed were mainly women and children, many of them Muslim.

Another serious problem for Christians is that an estimated 700 girls and women are kidnapped every year and forced to convert to Islam and marry their abductors. This has increased in frequency in recent years, and also happens to Hindus. Perpetrators know that the likelihood of conviction is low.

## **6(b) Examples of attacks against the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community**

Source: A beleaguered community: on the rising persecution of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community: report of fact finding mission to Pakistan of Asian Human Rights Commission, 2015 <sup>7</sup>

In May 28, 2010, in Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan, during Friday prayers. 94 people were killed and more than 120 were injured in nearly attacks against two mosques of the minority Ahmadiyya Community.

In July 2014, three Ahmadi females were killed in Gujranwala. This was the first time in the history of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community that only ladies were targeted. Eight Ahmadi houses were burned down as a result of an arson attack by a mob. A journalist the mission met said that he called the Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) to report the incident. The DSP's response was that there were only a few people protesting and they were only burning tyres. He also told the journalist that everything was under control and there was no danger of any kind. The journalist also tried to call the District Police Office in Okara who did not answer his phone. The journalist reported that he was trying desperately to draw the police's attention to the fact that people were dying at that very moment in Gujranwala. but to no avail.

On 26 May 2014 Dr Ali Qamar Mehdi, an Ahmadi of Canadian nationality, was gunned down in front of his wife and young son on account of his faith outside the Ahmadi cemetery in Rabwah. Dr Mehdi was a much loved doctor and a humanitarian.

On 7 September 2008 (anniversary of the Constitutional amendment which declared Ahmadis to be “non-Muslim”) Amir Liaquat Hussain, television anchor of a religious programme called Aalim on Line, incited his guest clerics to declare Ahmadis to be wajib ul qatal (liable to be killed) under Islamic teaching. The following day two Ahmadis were murdered.

Mr. Hussain invited religious scholars to give their views about the recent Peshawar School Attack on his GEO morning show of 22 December 2014. During the show that was broadcast live, while discussing the motives and people behind the recent barbaric school massacre a religious cleric, Arif Syed Shah Owaisi falsely accused the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community for the Peshawar School attack of 16 December. Mr. Owaisi declared “This enemy is a common enemy and an enemy of all Pakistan. And this enemy is the sect of Qadiani”. His comments were followed by loud applause from the audience. He encouraged all Muslims to treat Ahmadis as enemies of Islam and Pakistan. He declared that Ahmadis deserve to be killed because they are blasphemers: “They are the ones blaspheming against the Holy Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). All of us Muslims should recognise that enemy.” Five days later on 27 December 2014, the eleventh Ahmadi victim of 2014, Luqman Ahmad Shehzad, was shot in the back of the head near Bhiri Shah Rehman village, where a small community of Ahmadis reside in the Gujranwala district.

### **6(c) Examples of attacks against Atheists and Secularists**

Sources: linked to after each headline.

**Detained Pakistani Bloggers Face Blasphemy Charges** <sup>8</sup> An anti-terrorism court in Pakistan has put three online bloggers in the custody of a federal agency for a week so it can investigate blasphemy charges against them and determine whether they should be formally tried and punished. Pakistan’s Federal Investigation Agency, or FIA, arrested the three men earlier this week as part of an ongoing crackdown on suspects involved in posting blasphemous material on social media. Authorities say that laptops of the detainees have also been seized for forensic analysis.

**Pakistan: Bloggers Feared Abducted** <sup>9</sup> Government Needs to Investigate, Protect Journalists and Activists Update 1/11/2017: Prominent social activist Samar Abbas, the

head of the Civil Progressive Alliance Pakistan, reportedly went missing in Islamabad on January 7, 2017, and is feared to have been abducted. The government has provided no new information on the cases of the four apparently abducted activists. “It’s premature for the government to be claiming that they are moving in the right direction when the whereabouts of the missing activists remain unknown,” said Brad Adams. “In the meantime, another prominent activist is feared to have been abducted, suggesting that those responsible feel little pressure to end their illegal methods.”

(New York) – The Pakistani government should urgently investigate the apparent abductions of four activists who campaign for human rights and religious freedom, Human Rights Watch said today. The four men, Salman Haider, a well-known poet and academic, and bloggers Waqas Goraya, Aasim Saeed, and Ahmad Raza Naseer, went missing or were taken away from different cities between January 4 and January 7, 2017.

All four men were vocal critics of militant religious groups and Pakistan’s military establishment, and used the internet to disseminate their views. Their near simultaneous disappearance and the government’s shutting down of their websites and blogs raises grave concerns of government involvement. While the Pakistani interior minister, Nisar Ali Khan, directed the police on January 7 to speed up efforts to locate Haider, whom the government says it is not holding, a broader effort is needed to uncover the whereabouts and well-being of all four men.

People chant slogans as they hold signs and pictures of Sabeen Mahmud, a human rights activist who was shot by gunmen, during a protest demanding justice outside the Press Club in Karachi, Pakistan. “The Pakistani government has an immediate obligation to locate the four missing human rights activists and act to ensure their safety,” said Brad Adams, Asia director.

**Pakistan: More bloggers charged for blasphemy; radical cleric’s rally blocked by security forces** <sup>10</sup> Police and government officials said the newest charges were laid against two bloggers from Pakistan’s southern port city of Karachi and one from the federal capital. They were arrested earlier this week.

**With #HangAyazNizami, the Anti-Atheist Sentiment in South Asia is Getting Worse** <sup>11</sup> An Indian atheist, H. Farook, was hacked to death by assailants who were furious over posts he made to a WhatsApp group and Facebook page. Things haven’t gotten any better in the region since then. Ayaz Nizami and Rana Noman, two Pakistani atheists, were arrested last week on charges of blasphemy — because of things they posted on the Atheist & Agnostic Alliance Pakistan Facebook group and an online forum for the Council of Ex-

Muslims of Britain. Another person is said to have been arrested as well. (This came days after government officials asked Facebook and Twitter for help in identifying so-called blasphemers, though neither company has said it would comply with the request.)

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