



Pakistan - Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on Tuesday 5 March 2019

Treatment of Shia Muslims

A report released in May 2018 by the *United States Department of State* notes that:

“Members of religious minority communities continued to raise concerns regarding the government's inconsistency in safeguarding minority rights, and official discrimination against religious minorities persisted” (United States Department of State (29 May 2018) *2017 Report on International Religious Freedom: Pakistan*, p.1).

This document also states that:

“Armed sectarian groups connected to organizations banned by the government as extremist, as well as groups designated as terrorist organizations by the United States and other governments, staged attacks targeting Christians, Ahmadi Muslims, Sufi Muslims, and Shia Muslims, including the predominantly Shia Hazara community” (ibid, p.1).

It is also pointed out in this document that:

“Sectarian violent extremist groups continued to target Shia houses of worship, religious gatherings, religious leaders, and other individuals in attacks...” (ibid, p.18).

In June 2018 *Minority Rights Group International* states that:

“Shi'a account for approximately 10–15 per cent of the Muslim population of Pakistan. They include a number of different ethnic groups and can be found throughout the country. Pakistani Shi'a are represented in all walks of life, but in many cases have succeeded in playing prominent roles in Pakistan's cultural sphere and attaining influential, high-profile positions. Though as Muslims they are free from certain restrictions affecting other religious groups, Shi'a are still regarded as apostates by some extremist Sunni groups and individuals. As a result, many face regular hostility from extremists and public calls for members to be killed” (Minority Rights Group International (June 2018) *Pakistan, Shi'a and Hazaras*, p.1).

This document also states that:

“Though the escalation of violent attacks against Shi'a in the last decade has occurred alongside a general deterioration in the country's security context, the specific attacks against Shi'a are distinct in character and intent to most political killings, armed conflict deaths and indiscriminate violence against civilians. There have been a number of attacks on Shi'a pilgrims travelling to and from Iran to attend holy sites and festivals: the 700-km highway connecting Pakistan to Iran runs through Baluchistan and is vulnerable to militant attacks. The Shi'a community is not only affected by the wave of killings and suicide bombings. Shi'a have also been subjected to various forms of hate speech, most commonly as campaigns in mosques, schools, public spaces and increasingly on social media. Shi'a are vilified as a community for their religious beliefs and individuals are also picked out for

criticism. The campaigns openly label them as apostates or heretics, and call on Sunnis to kill them” (ibid, pp.2-3).

In October 2018 the *European Asylum Support Office* notes in a report that:

“Sectarian violence across Pakistan is present. Shias, but also Sunnis, Ahmadis, Christians and Hindus are victims of religiously motivated violence, especially carried out by Sunni militant groups...” (European Asylum Support Office (October 2018) *Pakistan Security Situation*, p.17).

A publication released in November 2018 by *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* notes that:

“Islamic State (IS) extremists have claimed responsibility for a suicide bombing that destroyed a market in Pakistan's northwestern Orakzai tribal district, killing at least 35 people and injuring more than 50...The town is in a Shi'ite-dominated part of the Orakzai district, which was one of seven autonomous tribal regions in Pakistan until earlier in 2018, when it was merged with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province” (Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (24 November 2018) *IS Claims 'Suicide' Attack On Market In Pakistani Tribal District*).

In November 2018 the *South Asia Terrorism Portal* notes in a report that:

“In Pakistan's sectarianism-riddled society, Shias are the primary targets, with the second largest population (estimated at 20 to 30 per cent of the total) in the Sunni dominated nation. The primary players in this sectarian violence have been TTP and LeJ, which aim to transform Pakistan into a Sunni state, primarily through violence” (South Asia Terrorism Portal (26 November 2018) *Pakistan: Sectarian Savagery*, p.2).

A report issued in 2019 by *Freedom House* reviewing events of 2018 states that:

“Constitutional guarantees of religious freedom have not provided effective safeguards against discriminatory legislation, social prejudice, and sectarian violence” (Freedom House (2019) *Freedom in the World 2019, Pakistan*, p.7).

A report issued in February 2019 by the *Centre for Research & Security Studies* commenting on conflict in recent years states that:

“The Shia and Shia Hazara communities suffered nearly 54% (815+289) of the total fatalities during 2013-18, followed by Sunnis (367), Sufis (198), Christians (171), and others” (Centre for Research & Security Studies (28 February 2019) *CRSS Annual Security Report, A comprehensive look at Pakistan's security situation from 2013 to 2018*, p.59).

A report issued in January 2019 by the *International Crisis Group* notes:

“...tensions provoked by intolerant and sectarian groups...” (International Crisis Group (28 January 2019) *Pakistan: Challenges of a Weak Democracy*, p.2).

This document also notes the:

“...fears of religious minorities that the state cannot protect them if those responsible for inciting and using violence against their communities operate with impunity” (ibid, p.3).

A report published by the *Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Australia* in February 2019 notes that:

“DFAT assesses, with the exception of the Ahmadi and Hazara communities...Pakistanis are generally able to practise their religion without official interference or discrimination. However, DFAT notes a trend of increased religious conservatism and intolerance towards religious minorities in Pakistan, which is likely to continue in 2019. Most religious minorities (with Ahmadi and Hazara exceptions noted above) face a moderate risk of societal discrimination and violence targeting religious ceremonies and places of worship” (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Australia (20 February 2019) *DFAT Country Information Report Pakistan*, p.34).

References

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This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Refugee Documentation Centre within time constraints. This response is not and does not purport to be conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please read in full all documents referred to.

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