



Pakistan - Researched and compiled by the Refugee Documentation Centre of Ireland on Tuesday 9 & Wednesday 10 July 2013

Information on IFA options for Muslim converts to Christianity

A paper issued by the *UNHCR* in May 2012 states:

“...an internal flight or relocation alternative (IFA/IRA) will generally not be available in Federally Administered Tribal Areas, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, as well as Balochistan province, which are currently affected by sustained security and military counter-insurgency operations and retaliatory militant attacks. Given the sustained religiously-motivated sectarian violence and the wide geographic reach of some armed militant groups, an IFA/IRA will generally not be available to individuals at risk of being targeted by such groups. Furthermore, UNHCR does not generally consider internal flight as a relevant option in cases where an individual is liable to criminal prosecution under the country's blasphemy and/or anti-Ahmadi laws” (UNHCR (14 May 2012) *UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Members of Religious Minorities from Pakistan*).

This document also points out that:

“Given the wide geographic reach of some armed militant groups, a viable IFA/IRA will generally not be available to individuals at risk of being targeted by such groups” (ibid).

This report also notes:

“Partly attributed to the growing influence of Sunni extremist ideology, violent anti-Christians attacks reportedly occur throughout the country...In many instances, the authorities are reportedly unable or unwilling to protect the lives and properties of Christians, or to bring the perpetrators of such violence to justice” (ibid).

It is also stated in this document that:

“UNHCR considers that members of the Christian community, including those targeted by Islamic extremist elements or charged with criminal offences under the blasphemy provisions, victims of bonded labour, severe discrimination, forced conversion and forced marriage, as well as Christians perceived as contravening social mores, may, depending on the individual circumstances of the case, be in need of international refugee protection on account of their religion...or membership of a particular social group” (ibid).

Citing an external source, a publication released in December 2012 by the *United Kingdom Home Office* notes:

“A Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) official at the British High Commission (BHC) in Islamabad stated in a letter to the UK Border Agency, dated 2 March 2011: We consulted internally with our Political Section, who deal with humanitarian and human rights issues. In short, it is difficult to corroborate the real situation, as this is a frequently hidden problem; our view is that converts would probably not want to draw

additional attention to themselves. However, we have ascertained the following anecdotal evidence from our dealings with external contacts in Pakistan:-

Firstly, in our opinion it would be difficult for Christian converts to live freely and openly in Pakistan, as converts over and above being Christian. It is our view that people who are known to have converted to Christianity suffer serious discrimination, for example in the workplace or by the authorities. It is far more difficult for people in Pakistan who are known to have converted to Christianity, than it is for people who were born Christian.

We understand that it would be rare for someone to convert to Christianity, or at least to do so openly, in Pakistan. It is therefore something of note for the community, with potential repercussions.

Our Political Section considered that internal relocation may be possible, in theory, as there were Christian communities in many urban areas such as Rawalpindi, and across Punjab and Sindh provinces. Due to the anonymity afforded by moving to an urban area, it may be feasible to relocate and not reveal the fact of the conversion. However, our view was also that the Christian communities were themselves becoming increasingly isolated from other communities. Therefore whilst it may be more difficult to socially exclude and harass a Christian who lives in a larger Christian community, it does not necessary preclude that harassment. ‘ (United Kingdom Home Office (7 December 2012) *Pakistan COI report*, p.164).

Research issued in January 2013 by the *Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada* states:

“Sources indicate that the majority of Christian Pakistanis live in the province of Punjab...half of the Christian population is concentrated in seven districts of Punjab - namely, Lahore, Faisalabad, Sialkot, Kasur, Sheikhpura, Gujranwala, and Toba Tek Singh -- and reside mostly in rural areas...(Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (14 January 2013) *Pakistan: Situation of Christians in Pakistan, including social and government attitudes, treatment and rights (2010-2012)*).

A report published in April 2013 by the *United States Commission on International Religious Freedom*

“Punjab province is the locus for the majority of violence, blasphemy cases, and discrimination against Christians, as it is home to the largest Christian community” (United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (30 April 2013) *United States Commission on International Religious Freedom Annual Report 2013: Pakistan*).

A report issued in May 2009 by *Writenet* states:

“Approximately 80 percent of Christians live in the Punjab, with around 14 percent in Sindh, 4 percent in the NWFP, and 2 percent in Balochistan” (Writenet (May 2009) *Pakistan: The Situation of Religious Minorities*, p.17).

This report also points out that:

“...violence against Christians is widespread across the whole of Pakistan...” (ibid, p.18).

A paper published in June 2011 by the *Jinnah Institute* states:

“...Christians across Pakistan live in a state of constant fear and insecurity” (Jinnah Institute (7 June 2011) *A Question of Faith: A Report on the Status of Religious Minorities in Pakistan*, p.31).

In January 2013 research issued by the *Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada* points out that:

“...stated that Muslim converts to Christianity are "not treated well" by society...” (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (14 January 2013) *Pakistan: Religious conversion, including treatment of converts and forced conversions (2009-2012)*).

The *Express Tribune* in July 2013 notes:

“A couple from a village in Sargodha has been forced into hiding here because of threats from the girl’s Muslim family after she converted from Islam in order to marry her Christian neighbour. While the couple faces death threats and is trying to eke out a new life in Lahore, the boy’s family has also been forced to flee the village and have had their properties taken over” (Express Tribune (10 July 2013) *Human rights: The heavy price of conversion and elopement*).

References

Express Tribune (10 July 2013) *Human rights: The heavy price of conversion and elopement*

<http://tribune.com.pk/story/574680/human-rights-the-heavy-price-of-conversion-and-elopement/>

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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.

Sources Consulted

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Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada
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