

# Persecution of Ahmadis in Pakistan

## *'In brief'*

*The Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at* is established in 210 countries of the world. This community was formed in Qadian, India in 1889 by Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad who was a great Muslim divine and reformer. The movement he started is an embodiment of the benevolent message of Islam – peace, universal brotherhood, universal justice and submission to the will of God. It rejects all forms of terrorism, and is opposed to the concept of aggressive violence to promote religion i.e. the present day concept of Jihad. Extremist *ulama* are vehemently opposed to this peaceful interpretation of Islam. They have used it as an excuse to excommunicate this Jama'at from the fold of Islam. In Pakistan and some other Muslim countries mullas, politicians and generals in power have co-operated with one another to suppress and persecute this reformist community.

In 1974, Mr. Z.A. Bhutto, the prime minister, found it politically advantageous to impose Non-Muslim status on Ahmadis through a constitutional amendment. In this vile innovation mullas supported him to the hilt. The change opened the door for the persecution of the community. Since then, the state and the mulla have acted as a team to severely persecute Ahmadis.

In 1984, ten years after the Amendment, dictator-president Zia-ul-Haq promulgated Ordinance XX that adversely affected everyday life of Ahmadis. This legislation made it a criminal offence punishable by three years' imprisonment and an unlimited fine if they practiced, propagated and even proclaimed their faith in Islam.

Yohanan Friedmann, a research scholar, in his book 'Prophecy Continuous' has written: "*The Ordinance promulgated by the President on April 26, 1984 goes a long way in accepting the most extreme anti-Ahmadi demands and transforms much of the daily life of the Community into a criminal offence.*"(University of California Press, 1989; p 46)

This law breaks the guarantee provided by the Constitution in Article 20 on freedom of religion. It blatantly violates Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, goes against the spirit of the United Nations Charter and is an obvious outrage against the UN General Assembly's Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination based on Religion or Belief. The UN Sub-commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities expressed its 'grave concern' at the promulgation of this Ordinance, and requested the UN Commission on Human Rights to call on the Government of Pakistan to repeal it (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1985/L.42 of 27 August 1985). It is nevertheless relentlessly applied.

As a result, since 1984, hundreds of Ahmadis have been murdered because of their faith, and the authorities have not prosecuted even 5% of the assailants. In 2010, 86 Ahmadi worshipers were slain in two mosques in Lahore in terrorist attack. The authorities decided to delay counteraction during the massacre; there is highly reliable evidence that they colluded with the terrorists. PML (N) was in power. In October 2005, eight Ahmadis were killed and 20 wounded when religious zealots sprayed bullets at worshippers in an Ahmadiyya mosque at Mong, District Mandi Bahaudin. Later the killers were arrested but a trial court let them off. In March 2012, the police tortured to death an Ahmadi president of

a local community. In July 2014, an Ahmadi woman and her two granddaughters including a seven month old baby died of asphyxiation in an arson attack in police presence.

Both the state and the mulla have targeted Ahmadiyya mosques. Twenty-seven mosques have been demolished, 33 sealed by the authorities, 23 set on fire or damaged and 17 have been forcibly occupied by the opponents since 1984.

In June of 2008, the authorities in Azad Kashmir blew up an Ahmadiyya mosque which was under-construction in District Kotli. On January 14, 2010 the authorities in the Punjab handed over an Ahmadiyya mosque in Ahmad Nagar to non-Ahmadis, although it was built by Ahmadis on land owned by an Ahmadi, and was under Ahmadiyya management for twenty years. In 2012 the police demolished minarets of Ahmadiyya mosque in Kharian. Most recently, a mob attacked an historic Ahmadiyya mosque in Sialkot and destroyed its minarets and domes, and severely damaged its doors and interior. This was done in the presence of the police and municipal officials. The riot leader, a PTI man, in a statement expressed his sincere thanks to the District administration for their substantial support.

The anti-Ahmadiyya law has been interpreted and applied maliciously all over Pakistan, often out of all contexts. For instance, grieving the survivors of the deceased, more than thirty bodies of Ahmadi dead have been disinterred from public graveyards, despite the fact that there is no provision in the law for this atrocious act. In December 2012, miscreants in cahoots with police defiled and damaged 120 graves in Ahmadiyya graveyard in Model Town, Lahore. The police itself did the same to 23 tombstones in Jaranwala.

Under the rules Ahmadis cannot vote unless they do so as ‘non-Muslims’. The application form for voters’ registration has been so maliciously and cunningly devised by the government that Ahmadis are unable to register as voters. Despite Joint Electorate Ahmadis are placed on a separate list of voters, as Non-Muslims. The recent Election Act 2017 was amended to include all the discriminatory and prohibitive provisions to prevent Ahmadis’ voting.

In the town of Rabwah, which serves as the center for the community in Pakistan, and where 95% of the residents are Ahmadi, the local councils do not have even a single Ahmadi representative. Practically Ahmadis have no say in the affairs of the local Union Councils. As a consequence, essential civic services like water, streets, sewage etc. are in a deplorable state in this town of 60,000 population.

Ahmadis’ right of peaceful religious assembly has been severely curtailed. The annual convention of the community in Rabwah has not been allowed since 1984, while non-Ahmadis, with the help of the government, are able to hold numerous highly slanderous open-air conferences every year in Rabwah causing disquiet and discomfort to its residents and flagrantly injuring their feelings. The government changed the name of Rabwah to Chenab Nagar in 1999 against the wishes of its residents.

In May 2008, Ahmadis planned to celebrate the centenary of the Ahmadiyya Khilafat but the police prohibited them to do that. Some years ago they booked the entire population of Rabwah. The authorities have prohibited community’s annual sports, rallies, celebrations etc.

In the field of education, Ahmadi students encounter unabashed prejudice in public institutions of higher learning and professional education. The events that occurred in the Punjab Medical College Faisalabad during June and July 2008 are public knowledge. The principal rusticated all the 23 male and female Ahmadi students. In 2011, ten students were expelled from their schools in district Hafizabad and seven

in district Chakwal, only for their faith. In 2016, a class three Ahmadi child and a Prep class student were expelled from a school in Attock.

This deplorable anti-Ahmadiyya law (Ordinance XX) continues to be applied extensively and heedlessly. Violations of Ahmadis' religious freedom are systematic, ongoing and egregious. To-date more than three and a half thousand criminal cases have been registered against Ahmadis throughout Pakistan under the provisions of the anti-Ahmadiyya and other religious laws like the Blasphemy laws. Since the promulgation of Ordinance XX, hardly a day passed when an Ahmadi was not in prison for an offence or incident rooted in his faith. Last year 77 Ahmadis were booked by the police in cases based on religion.

Ahmadi charged under a blasphemy clause, PPC 295-A, have also been prosecuted in anti-terrorism courts, although it was they who suffered from terrorism at the hand of the state. Recently, Voice of America issued a research report on Ahmadis, and gave it the title: **Pakistan Minority Victimized in the Name of Fighting Extremism.**

For over three decades now, the Ahmadiyya community in Pakistan has experienced prolific and persistent hate propaganda from the vernacular print media. The electronic media has joined this ugly race. News, op-eds and comments against Ahmadis are often grossly false, provocative and orchestrated. The law does not allow Ahmadis to explain their position in public (*proselytizing!*), while the authorities, in the name of freedom of press and media, do not advise the hate-mongers to stop their hate and rancor. Referring to the Ahmadiyya situation in Pakistan, International Humanist and Ethical Union conveyed to the UNHRC in 2010, **“Need we remind the Council and the government of Pakistan that it was government and media support for expressions of hatred that led to the Nazi Holocaust and the genocide in Rwanda.”**

Regrettably the judiciary provided little relief to the persecuted community. Lower courts generally, and higher courts often interpret the anti-Ahmadi laws very harshly. Even the Supreme Court has given the senseless inference in 1993 that an Ahmadi who displays any commitment to the Islamic creed commits blasphemy against the Holy Prophet [p.b.u.h.]. With such loose definition of 'blasphemy' and the attitude of the apex court, hundreds of Ahmadis have been exposed to the mischief of the blasphemy law that now prescribes nothing but death for its victims. Over three hundred Ahmadis have faced fabricated charges under the Blasphemy law to-date. In the last two years, the higher courts have been harsher and more unsympathetic to Ahmadi accused than before. In October 2017 three Ahmadis were wrongfully charged under PPC 295-C and sentenced to death.

Since the death of General Zia in 1988, no government, democratic or military, has provided any relief to Ahmadis. Pakistan adopts a medieval approach in its treatment of Ahmadis. They continue to face severe discrimination and persecution during the present democratic regime as well, in every sphere of personal and public life. The severity of state-supported persecution has forced thousands of Ahmadis to flee the country and seek shelter abroad. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan candidly wrote in its annual report: **“Ahmadis faced the worst discrimination and remained effectively disenfranchised. HRCP continued to demand that joint electorate be fully restored.”** International human rights organizations like Amnesty International and the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom have often reported on the plight of Ahmadis in Pakistan. The situation has worsened since democratic governments took over in 2008.

**‘Blood, Jihad and Duty to kill’** have been discussed in popular electronic media in the Ahmadiyya context, and target-killings of Ahmadi leaders have taken place. In 2011, mullas declared Ahmadis ‘worthy of death’ and published in leaflets addresses of prominent Ahmadis and their businesses in Sargodha, Faisalabad and Khushab. The authorities took no action against the instigators.

The provincial government in the Punjab has adopted the policy of doing the mulla’s bid. It recently banned more than 90 books and publications of the Ahmadiyya community on recommendations of its Ulama Board. It forbade Ahmadis to publish their translations of the Holy Quran. Also, the only book depot in Rabwah was raided by authorities; its octogenarian proprietor was arrested and was given 8 year’s imprisonment after a speedy trial for selling Ahmadiyya books that have been accused for the past 125 years for being ‘anti-Jihad’. On December 5, 2016 the authorities mounted a Counter Terrorism raid on Ahmadiyya central offices. This was like adding insult to injury, in addition to being the first ever such action against Ahmadis. The persecution has worsened with time, most Ahmadis feel. They are at great risk due to continuous flood of hateful propaganda.

Rather than learning a lesson from the futility and harm of the anti-Ahmadi legislation, the Azad Jammu and Kashmir government proceeded in February 2018 to amend its own constitution and laws in line with those of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. Sky is the limit of religious bigotry in this region called South Asia!

The persecution of Ahmadis in Pakistan will end only if and when the draconian Ahmadi-specific laws, which are an affront to human rights and freedom of religion, are repealed; but initially the following minimal doable steps should be taken by the present federal and provincial governments at the earliest opportunity to meet their obligations under *le contrat social* that formed the basis on which the state of Pakistan was created, the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to which the state of Pakistan is a signatory:

1. **Direct the police and the administration to withdraw support and co-operation to the mulla in the implementation of anti-Ahmadi laws. Culture of impunity over attacks on Ahmadis’ human rights and freedom of faith should end.**
2. **Ahmadiyya schools and colleges should be denationalized like others and handed back to the community without further delay. The existing policy of denationalization should be implemented by the Punjab government without discrimination.**
3. **The name of ‘Chenab Nagar’ town should be changed back to Rabwah.**

**In view of the National Action Plan, Amendment No XXI to the Constitution, the SC judgment of June 19, 2014, and the declared counter-terrorism state policy, the government should implement the above mentioned actionable recommendations without any further delay.**

**June 1, 2018**