

Pakistani activist devotes his career to Muslim minority rights

Ehsan Rehan, 26, now lives in Washington, D.C., meeting with U.S. policymakers and international visitors.

by [Madiha Waris Qureshi](#) in the [August 30, 2017](#) issue

When Ehsan Rehan was still in high school, he founded *Rabwah Times*, a digital magazine about religious freedom and minority rights in Pakistan.

Rehan, 26, is Ahmadi, a minority sect of Islam that many other Muslims consider to be heretics. The Ahmadiyya community believes that Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, who lived from 1835 to 1908, was the messiah and *mahdi* (Arabic for “guided one”). Ahmad taught respect for different beliefs and an end to interreligious violence.

A majority of the estimated 10 million Ahmadis in the world reside in Pakistan under daily threat of persecution that has grown dramatically in the last decade. They are banned from worshiping at mainstream mosques or reading the Qur’an in public. In the last several years, hundreds have been killed at their mosques and homes, sometimes by vigilante mobs.

Given his online writings about minority rights—something for which other Pakistanis have been killed—Rehan’s parents encouraged him to leave the country, despite the fact that he was their only child.

Rehan now lives in Washington, D.C., and meets with U.S. policymakers and those visiting from Pakistan in a quest to influence Pakistani policies and educate the American public. There are 16,000 Ahmadis in the United States.

“I do not think there is anything more important in my life than this,” he said. “America didn’t just give me refuge and a pathway to freedom. It’s given me a stronger sense of purpose.”

Rehan continues to run *Rabwah Times*, which international human rights watchdogs rely upon for news about Ahmadi persecution, and he recently joined AdvoPak, a nonprofit group that advocates for religious freedom in Pakistan.

“I was very surprised as to how open and welcoming Pakistani-American Muslims were to me at large,” he said.

But Rehan notes that mainstream Muslim organizations such as the Islamic Society of North America and the Council on American-Islamic Relations still refuse to accept Ahmadis as Muslims and avoid engaging with them at a community level.

Amjad Mahmood Khan, an adjunct professor at UCLA Law School, said the U.S. government should pay closer attention to Ahmadi persecution.

“The U.S. should be very concerned about the weaponization of laws in Pakistan against religious minorities,” Khan said. “Ahmadi Muslims escaping religious repression frequently look to the U.S. as a beacon of hope, and we hope the U.S. State Department continues to actively process and resettle Ahmadi Muslim refugee cases from Pakistan.” —Religion News Service