

Asia Bibi, Pakistani woman charged with blasphemy, freed

“She appears to be a person, in the words of Shakespeare’s King Lear, ‘more sinned against than sinning,’” the Supreme Court wrote in its ruling.

by [Naila Inayat](#) in the [December 5, 2018](#) issue



Asia Bibi (right) with her husband, Ashiq Masih. [Some rights reserved](#) by [HazteOir.org](#).

The Supreme Court of Pakistan acquitted Asia Bibi, a Christian woman who has been on death row since 2010 after being accused of blaspheming the Prophet Muhammad.

Yet her husband, Ashiq Mesih, has said the family may need to leave the country; he and their children rarely go outside for fear of attack.

The court on October 31 found her innocent of the charges because prosecutors failed to prove their case beyond a reasonable doubt. Bibi, 51, has denied that she insulted the Prophet Muhammad in an argument with colleagues.

“She appears to be a person, in the words of Shakespeare’s King Lear, ‘more sinned against than sinning,’” the judges wrote in their ruling, which also quoted the Qur’an and Islamic scholars.

If prosecutors had been successful in seeking the maximum penalty for Bibi, it would have been the first time the government executed someone for defiling the Prophet. In the 1980s, the country’s military leaders began handing down sentences of life imprisonment and death for blasphemy. Several hundred Ahmadi and other Muslims—as well as dozens of Christians and Hindus—have been charged since 1987, according to the National Commission for Justice and Peace, a Catholic group.

“Pakistan is an Islamic state,” said Mohammad Zahir, 29, a supporter of the far-right Islamist political party Tehreek-e-Labbaik. “If Christians or Ahmadis have issues living here, they can leave and go to Israel.”

Among Pakistan’s Christians, who are 2 percent of the population, some saw the ruling as a vindication of their rights.

Wilson Chowdhry, chairman of the British Pakistani Christian Association, noted that Bibi spent most of her eight years in prison in solitary confinement.

“Her freedom can hardly be called justice, and nothing will ever compensate her for her lost years,” Chowdhry said. —Religion News Service

FOLLOWING UP (Updated May 20, 2019): Asia Bibi remained in the country in the weeks after her release despite threats to her life and her family, according to news reports. The ruling party, led by Pakistan’s prime minister, Imran Khan, made a deal with antiblasphemy extremists to end days of protests against Bibi’s acquittal by the nation’s highest court. Officials agreed they would not block a request to reverse the court ruling and that Bibi would be placed on the “exit control list” so that she could not depart to receive asylum in another country.

“Placing Asia Bibi on the ECL is like signing her death warrant,” Wilson Chowdhry of the British Pakistani Christian Association told the *Guardian*.

Bibi was finally allowed to leave in early May, Religion News Service reported. She was reunited in Canada with her daughters, who arrived in December at a location not being identified because Bibi was still receiving death threats. The family has “a very good support group” to aid their resettlement, family friend Nadeem Bhatti told RNS.

Version of this article appears in the print edition on the People page and in the Following up section.