

**Statement of CCA General Secretary on
Pakistan's Supreme Court's decision of Acquittal of Ms. Asia Bibi
from Blasphemy Death Sentence**

It is with profound thanks to God Almighty that the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) welcomes the news that the appeal of Ms. Asia Bibi was allowed, and she has been acquitted from all the charges under section 295-C of the Pakistan Penal Code by the Supreme Court of Pakistan. The reversal of the judgment of the high court, as well as trial court and setting aside Ms. Bibi's conviction in a ruling by Pakistan's Chief Justice Saqib Nisar, is laudable.

After being sentenced to death in 2010, Asia Bibi has been undergoing an ordeal as she was on the death row. It is credible that despite religious extremist groups and mobs clamouring for Asia Bibi's death sentence, the Supreme Court stood firm on its decision based on facts, not misguided emotions and insinuations, to overturn the blasphemy conviction and the death sentence. We believe that the verdict of acquittal by the Supreme Court marks a major step towards making Pakistan a more tolerant nation. The decision of the Supreme Court is a hopeful sign of the commitment of the judiciary in Pakistan to uphold the independence of the judiciary, and protection of the rights of the marginalized and vulnerable religious minorities in the country.

CCA is concerned about the violence precipitated in Pakistani society in the aftermath of the Supreme Court verdict. It is unfortunate that several parts of the Country remain tensed of protests. Majority schools remain closed, hospitals placed on high alert. The railway network in Lahore is suffering disruptions due to protests and suspension of mobile signals. CCA urges authorities in Pakistan to ensure the security of the acquitted along with her family as well as the lawyers who have been consistently arguing her case in courts. It is unfortunate that the blasphemy law supporters and Islamic fundamentalists groups together with miscreants are organizing protests on streets, and pelting stones at police in main cities in the country.

CCA appreciates the bold steps taken by Prime Minister Imran Khan who addressed the issue directly and unambiguously as well as strongly defended the decision of the Supreme Court. The prime minister's unwavering decision of issuing a stern warning to religious-political hardliners that have been agitating against the verdict to acquit Asia Bibi is commendable.

CCA prays for the safety and security of Ms. Asia Bibi, her lawyers, and the judges who made decision to set free Asia Bibi. CCA beseeches for the divine guidance for the Prime Minister and all lawmakers in the country to exercise their authority and respond to the situation in a fair and just manner.

Mathews George Chunakara
General Secretary, CCA

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