

# Christian sentenced to death in Pakistan for blasphemy

September 15, 2020

LAHORE, Pakistan (BP)—As a result of strict Islamic blasphemy laws, a 37-year-old Christian was sentenced to death because of allegations he insulted the Islamic prophet Muhammad via text messages to a coworker, The Associated Press reported.

Originally accused by Muhammad Saeed Khokher in 2013, Asif Pervaiz spent seven years in jail, awaiting the court's hearing of the case. On Sept. 8, the court in Lahore sentenced Pervaiz to three years in prison, a fine of 50,000 rupees and death, according to a report from *Morning Star News*, an independent news service focused on the persecution of Christians.

Pervaiz said he lost the SIM card to his phone and that while he worked with Khokher, he was subjected to pressure and harassment about converting to Islam. Pervaiz's attorney, Saiful Malook, said Khokher used Pervaiz's SIM card to send the "blasphemous" texts to his own number.

"In his statement to the court, Pervaiz had categorically said that the complainant used to pressure him to renounce his Christian faith and convert to Islam," Malook told *Morning Star News*. "Pervaiz said that due to the complainant's constant harassment, he was forced to leave his job at the factory, but the latter continued to hound him at his new workplace."

Although Pakistan blasphemy laws say that anyone accused of insulting Islam can be sentenced to death if found guilty, Pervaiz plans to appeal the ruling.

*Morning Star News* quoted Malook on the state of blasphemy cases in Pakistan: "Although I'm greatly disappointed by the ruling in this case, one

cannot ignore the fact that it has become a norm of trial court judges hearing blasphemy cases to convict the accused no matter how weak the prosecution's case is."

Pervaiz's case came only shortly after the death of Tahir Naseem, an American man who allegedly claimed to be Islam's prophet. According to the AP, Naseem was killed in a courtroom in Peshawar, Pakistan, during his trial.