

# Pakistan court overturns blasphemy conviction; Asia Bibi freed

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ISLAMABAD, Pakistan (BP)—Christian mother Asia Bibi was released from Pakistan’s death row Oct. 31 after the nation’s Supreme Court reversed her 2010 conviction of blasphemy.

Religious liberty advocates globally expressed jubilation and pleas that Pakistan’s military protect Bibi. Meanwhile, Muslim extremists reportedly began burning tires in the streets.

Renewed death threats against the court, other leaders and Bibi should be taken seriously, advocates said. Bibi’s current location has not been disclosed. At least two countries have offered her asylum, CNN reported.

Two government leaders who advocated for Bibi’s release during her eight-year ordeal were murdered in 2011—cabinet member Shabbaz Bhatti and Punjab governor Salmaan Taseer.



Asia Bibi

Bibi’s case illustrates the inhumanity of blasphemy laws, which allow the

death penalty for convictions in Pakistan, said Tenzin Dorjee, chair of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom.

“The case of Asia Bibi illustrates the extent to which blasphemy laws can be exploited to target minority communities,” Dorjee said. “These laws seek to protect entire religions rather than the individual, as should be the case under international human rights standards.

“It is deeply troubling that Bibi’s case even reached this level, where she almost became the first person in Pakistan’s history to be executed for the crime of blasphemy.”

Bibi was sentenced to death by hanging in 2010 on charges of insulting the prophet Muhammad while working in a field as a day laborer in 2009. When Bibi offered a co-worker a cup of water, the woman said Bibi’s Christianity made the water ceremonially unclean. This set off a chain of false accusations related to Bibi’s beliefs and backed by Muslim clerics. Bibi refused to convert to Islam and was accused of insulting the prophet Muhammad.

Since 1986 when Pakistan updated its blasphemy laws, at least 150 Christians, 564 Muslims, 459 Ahmadis and 21 Hindus have been jailed on blasphemy charges, Open Doors International reported.