

The Honorable Prime Minister Imran Khan

Islamic Republic of Pakistan

Constitution Avenue, G-5/2,

Islamabad, Pakistan

Cc:

The Foreign Minister Makhdoom Shah Mahmood Qureshi

Foreign Office Building

Constitution Avenue,

Islamabad, Pakistan

22 May, 2020

Your Excellency,

We, the undersigned individuals and organizations, come together from a myriad of religious, ethnic, and political backgrounds to collaborate on issues regarding international religious freedom and human rights. With deepest respect for your influential position as Prime Minister of Pakistan, we would like to collectively call on you to take measures to release prisoners throughout the country in order to mitigate the spread of the novel coronavirus through the prison and public communities. We would also like to express our appreciation for your efforts so far to tackle the coronavirus by publicly discouraging your citizens from attending large gatherings, considering a nation-wide lockdown and, as of recently, using intelligence technology to track the spread of the virus and individuals who may be at increased risk of spreading or contracting the disease. Your swift efforts are very much necessary.

We seek your humanitarian intervention. We would like to draw to your attention the case of Pakistani Christian couple Shagufta Kausar and Shafqat Emmanuel, who have remained in prison since 2014 over questionable charges. In 2013, Shagufta and Shafqat were accused by a Muslim leader of sending him blasphemous texts written in English from a phone registered in Shagufta's name. Despite some questionable case details, such as that the couple are illiterate in Urdu, let alone English, and therefore would be unable to send such texts, and the fact that the SIM card of said phone has been unrecoverable, the couple was charged with "insulting the Qur'an" and "insulting the Prophet" and sentenced to death in April of 2014.

Since their sentencing, the couple has been separated and held in separate prisons, one in Multan and one in Faisalabad, where they have remained for the past five years. Both Shagufta and Shafqat have expressed the depression they face in not being with their children. In an

attempt to be absolved of the false charges posed against them, the couple appealed their sentences, and their final verdict was to be read at the Lahore High Court on April 8, 2020. However, due to the untimely outbreak and swift spread of COVID-19, their final decision has been postponed until the coronavirus has been tackled in Pakistan. We find that this is unreasonable, considering that the judge presiding over the case has expressed that the couple's charges are "dubious" and the couple's lawyer, Saif ul-Malook, has expressed that he finds it extremely likely that the court will make a favorable decision for Shagufta and Shafqat.

We ask that you consider the case of Shagufta Kausar and Shafqat Emmanuel and release them on humanitarian grounds considering that (1) they were likely to be absolved given the questionable and unprovable nature of their accusations, and (2) that remaining in prison places them at a great risk of contracting COVID-19, which has already been confirmed in some prisons throughout Punjab Province. It is essential to note that Shafqat has remained paralyzed since 2004, when an accident caused him to fracture his spine. This couple are older individuals, and it is a well-known fact that the deadly coronavirus takes advantage of individuals whose health is already compromised due to pre-existing medical conditions. It is unacceptable that Shafqat remains vulnerable in prison without proper medical care when he already suffers from a major disability that would impair his ability to fight off the virus if he should contract it.

While we hope that you will pay particular attention to the case of Shagufta Kausar and Shafqat Emmanuel, we also ask that you take into consideration the mass populations within Pakistani prisons and detention facilities some of whom are particularly vulnerable on account of preexisting conditions. In a recent government publication, it was estimated that the number of coronavirus cases in Pakistan could reach 50,000 by April 25th, and recent news reports reveal that the spread has already infiltrated some prison locations. We urge you to follow in the footsteps of the Islamic Republic of Iran, whose government has already preemptively released some 85,000 prisoners temporarily to prevent the overcrowded prisons from becoming saturated with thousands more coronavirus that could be prevented. Specific attention should be focused on the elderly, disabled, unhealthy, and vulnerable.

We also ask that you consider prisoners of conscience at this time. Should you choose to take measures to release prisoners, we ask that you consider their cases and release permanently and unconditionally such individuals who have been sentenced and imprisoned (1) on false charges, (2) because of their religious practice, worship, and/or teaching, and (3) for their political opinions.

With greatest appreciation for your endeavors,

Organizations:

Center for Civil Liberties (Ukraine)

Center for Pluralism

Christian Freedom International

Christian Solidarity Worldwide

Church of Scientology National Affairs Office

Coordination des Associations et des Particuliers pour la Liberté de Conscience

Family Research Council

Independent Old Catholic Church Office of Ecumenical, Interfaith, and Global Engagement

Institute for Global Engagement

Jubilee Campaign

LYN Community

Reach Out International

The Salt & Light Council

Individuals:

Fr. John Anderson

St. Nicholas Freedom Group

Dr. Fabong Jemchang Yildam

Chairman

Plateau State Youth Council

Farahnaz Ispahani

Global Fellow

Woodrow Wilson Center

Former Member

National Assembly of Pakistan

Dede Laugesen

Executive Director

Save the Persecuted Christians

Scott Morgan
President
Red Eagle Enterprises

Rev. Joseph K. Grieboski
Senior Fellow
The Dietrich Bonhoeffer Institute

William Brown
Christian Activist Network of New England

Lela Gilbert
Senior Fellow
International Religious Freedom
Family Research Council

Paul Pickern
All Pro Pastors

Nina Shea
Director
Hudson Institute's Center for Religious Freedom

Elizabeth Yore
Attorney
YoreChildren

Dr. S. Bryan Hickox
President & CEO
Bryan Hickox Pictures, Inc.

Pastor Jonathan Friedt
Believers' Fellowship Church

Gunnery Sergeant Jessie Jane Duff (ret)
Co-Chairman Advisory Board Veterans for Trump
Military Advisor Committee on the Present Danger China

Mike Slotznick
The America Team for Displaced Eritreans

Dran Reese
President

The Salt & Light Council

Linda Harvey
President
Mission America

Pastor Greg Young
Host
Nationally Syndicated Radio Show
Chosen Generation Radio

Kevin Freeman
Founder
NSIC Institute

Dr. Oluwasayo Ajiboye
Mission Africa International

Rev. Mario Felix Leonart Barroso
Patmos Institute

Anwar Mehmood
Ahmadiyya Muslim Community

Dr. Mike Mohamed Ghouse
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