

Ambassador Babar Amin
Embassy of Pakistan to Norway
PO Box 4051 AMB
0244 Oslo, Norway

Your Excellency,

I am writing to express my concern regarding Stephen Masih, a member of the Christian minority in Sialkot District, who has been arrested for allegedly committing blasphemy and is being denied a fair trial or the release on bail, despite suffering from mental illness.

Following a dispute with a neighbor in Imran Pura Badian village in March 2019, Mr. Masih was attacked by a mob at his house who severely beat him and set his house on fire. While the mob went away unpunished, authorities filed a First Information Report against Masih and detained him. Only three months later, he was informed about the blasphemy charges.

Mr. Masih has been detained since his arrest on 15 March 2019 and has still not received a final sentence. In addition to having been detained on wrongful accusations of blasphemy and held back from attending several court hearings regarding the case, Mr. Masih suffers from mental disabilities which, in March 2020, a board of medical professionals concluded makes him unfit for trial. Regardless, the application for bail filed by Masih's lawyer was denied by the Session Court in Sialkot on 5 August 2021, who rather decided to delay the trial until Mr. Masih "gains his mental health." Mr. Masih's application to be released into the care of his brothers because of his poor health was also denied.

Your Excellency, Stephen Masih has been unjustly detained for over two years, without access to the alleged prosecutions material evidence, breaching the principle of equality of arms enshrined in ICCPR Article 14. He is being denied a fair trial and his mental illness is not taken into consideration by the courts. Mr. Masih is being wrongfully targeted and accused because of his vulnerability as a member of a minority faith community and a person with mental disabilities. I am hopeful that these are exactly the kind of individuals Pakistan would rather seek to support and protect. I, humbly petition your intervention to ensure that:

- Stephen Masih is immediately and unconditionally released from prison;
- the Government of Pakistan takes measures to combat advocacy of religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination and violence, particularly concerning vulnerable individuals and groups belonging to religious minorities;
- all citizens are treated as equals before the law and given access to fair trials, according to Article 14 of the ICCPR.

Sincerely,