

# **An An Islamic scholar shot dead in Pakistan on Blasphemy charges**

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A Statement from the Asian Human Rights Commission

**PAKISTAN: An Islamic scholar is shot dead by “unknown” persons on Blasphemy charges**

The menace of ‘unknown persons’ shooting to death innocent civilians continues in Pakistan. This time, Dr. Shakeel Auj, the Dean of the Faculty of Islamic Studies of the University of Karachi has been reported shot dead by ‘unknown persons’. Reports reveal that Dr. Auj, was shot dead - this time with much more precision - point blank range from behind his moving vehicle, killing him on the spot. Three other colleagues who were with him in the car at the time had miraculously survived the shooting.

Dr. Auj was a well-known and a distinguished scholar, renowned for his liberal and enlightened ideas on the philosophy of Islam. He remained a staunch critic of orthodox circles and the conservatives. Before the incident he had been receiving threatening messages from different quarters including from several teaching professors from University of Karachi. An Islamic seminary (a Madrasah[1]) had in recent days issued a fatwa (edict) declaring him as blasphemous and liable to be killed. According to reports, the police had themselves claimed to have cognizance of these threats to Dr Auj’s life since the time he had lodged a police complaint by way of a First Information Report as way back as in 2012. Despite such complaints being lodged, the police - as is the usual manner- have never even considered providing Dr. Auj any form of protection nor was there any action or investigation launched by the police on the actions of the leaders of the Madrasah against whom the said complaints were made.

Dr. Auj, on the day of the shooting, had been travelling to attend a ceremony at the Iranian Cultural Centre, held in his honour for being awarded the ‘Sitare Imtiaz’ award which is awarded by the Government of Pakistan, in recognition of his academic achievements. At the time of the shooting several of his colleagues and other academic staff had been travelling in his vehicle as well as in several other vehicles together to attend the awards ceremony.

The expertise and precision with which such ‘unknown persons’ go about killing their prey is nothing less, but shocking in nature. As staff members have later stated, till the last minute, no one in the party had known in which particular vehicle they would be travelling in. This was no obstacle for the killers, who had trailed the car in which Dr. Auj was travelling in. Dr. Auj had occupied the back seat of the car and had been sitting in the middle seat in between two of his colleagues - all such details the killers seemed to have been aware of. The ‘unknown gunmen’ had chased Dr. Auj’s car at break neck speed and no sooner the vehicle neared the bridge on the University Road, the ‘unknown gunmen’ had fired two shots through the car’s windshield with a 0.9 millimeter pistol. The shots were heard by the other colleagues seated in the car - who had suddenly noticed Dr. Auj bleeding

profusely from his head. He had died on the spot. The Post Mortem Report states that two bullets had struck Dr. Auj on the neck and had exited through his eye - killing him in an instant.

This is the third instance of a target killing of an Islamic scholar during this month alone. All scholars so killed have been well known for harboring liberal and progressive views on Islam and were against the insurrections of any Islamic militancy and sectarian killings in Pakistan.

On 10<sup>th</sup> September 2014, a religious cleric Maulana Masood Baig of Jamia Binoria Aalimiyah was gunned down Karachi. The incident took place when "unknown persons" opened fire on his vehicle which killed him on the spot. This shooting took place on the same stretch of road where Dr. Auj was shot dead. Mr. Baig was the Chief Administrator at the "Girls' Education Department of the Jamia Binoria Aalimiyah and also a distinguished visiting faculty member at the University of Karachi.

On 6<sup>th</sup> September 2014, a Shia cleric, Ali Akbar Kumaili, was shot dead also by "unknown persons" while he was travelling in a car. He was shot dead by an 'unknown person' who had followed his car on a motor bike. He was the elder son of Allama Abbas Kumaili, another scholar hailing from the Shia sect.

Such incidents of violence is steadily increasing in the country with more money being spent on the acquisition of high tech and latest high speed weapons and ammunition and yet more money being spent on the law enforcement agencies to equip them with such technical knowhow and expertise. The main reason for such a scale-up of violence is the appeasement policies of the successive governments in Pakistan towards sectarian groups such as the Taliban and the Islamic seminaries (Madrasahs) which number in thousands. One report states that at least three hundred thousand such Madrasahs exists today and are located in every city and every village. The government does not control this mushroom growth of sectarian groups and it is also a general perception that state intelligence agencies are openly involved in the formation of such seminaries to prepare students for Jihad ( or holy war) against India and Afghanistan. Every sect of Islam have their own Madrasahs and are involved in teaching hatred against each such sect.

The main reason of such intolerance in the society and bigotries is the misuse of blasphemy laws which has accorded absolute power and authority to these vigilantes to declare any person a blasphemer - which is considered by Islamic extremists as a 'license to kill'. Dr. Auj was also declared a blasphemer following a speech he made while visiting the United States, where he had said to his girl students that even if they wear nail polish or lipstick it will not bar them from offering Namaz (Islamic way of prayers offered five times a day) and where he had denounced Islamic militancy and Jihad.

The absence of the rule of law has generated intolerance in the country. Powerful groups and militant organizations know very well, the flaws in the law and the weaknesses of the law enforcement agencies - which together act as the main reasons behind such sectarian groups being able to have access to knowledge and skills on ways to manipulate the law and dodge due legal processes and the judiciary. Moreover, in the absence of witness protection and a proper criminal justice system, these militants - even if legal action is resorted to - receive the benefit from the long drawn and tiring legal procedures. The writ of the rulers is said to be limited to their official residencies with heavy protocol and they feel happy if the people are divided through religious hatred, sectarian and ethnic lines.

This was evident when in a recent event, in May this year, 68 lawyers were arrested on charges of committing blasphemy for shouting against a police officer for attacking the lawyers whose name was similar to the name of a holy person in Islam.

<http://www.humanrights.asia/news/ahrc-news/AHRC-STM-089-2014/?searchterm=Pakistan%20blas>

[phemy%20lawyers](#)

The government including especially the parliament, have least interest in abolishing such blasphemy laws because of a fear of a backlash from these extremist groups. Though there is a law that no blasphemy case can be instituted by any police officer in a rank less than that of a Superintendent of Police, a mere loudspeaker announcement from a Mosque or a Madrasah is sufficient for any person to be killed in Pakistan - and this is totally ignored by both the government and the police. To date, not a single person has been tried for killing or instigating to kill an alleged blasphemer in Pakistan.

Pakistan is today categorized amongst the failed States in the world because of its indifferent attitude for not controlling Islamic militancy and religious intolerance. The country is incapable of providing safety and security to its citizens and from its irresponsible enforcement of blasphemy laws, which are grossly abused. In an annual report, the US Commission on International Religious Freedom states that Pakistan "represents the worst situation in the world for religious freedom" among countries that are not already on the US blacklist and that conditions in the past year, 2014 has hit an "all-time low" - and this is no surprise.

*Please also see few links about the misuse of Blasphemy laws:*

<http://www.humanrights.asia/news/ahrc-news/AHRC-STM-084-2014/?searchterm=Pakistan%20blasphemy>

<http://www.humanrights.asia/news/ahrc-news/AHRC-ART-024-2014/?searchterm=Pakistan%20blasphemy>

<http://www.humanrights.asia/news/ahrc-news/AHRC-STM-036-2011/?searchterm=Pakistan%20blasphemy>

<http://www.humanrights.asia/news/urgent-appeals/AHRC-UAC-146-2012/?searchterm=Pakistan%20Ramsha%20Masih>

<http://www.humanrights.asia/news/ahrc-news/AHRC-STM-001-2011/?searchterm=Salman%20Taseer>

<http://www.humanrights.asia/news/urgent-appeals/AHRC-UAC-063-2013/?searchterm=Pakistan%20blasphemy>

<http://www.humanrights.asia/news/urgent-appeals/AHRC-UAC-205-2012/?searchterm=Pakistan%20blasphemy>

<http://www.humanrights.asia/news/forwarded-news/FA-08-2001/?searchterm=Pakistan%20blasphemy>

<http://www.humanrights.asia/news/forwarded-news/AHRC-FAT-036-2009/?searchterm=Pakistan%20blasphemy>

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