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PAKISTAN | Case Remains in Limbo After High Court Hearing

The Islamabad High Court (IHC) in Pakistan on Nov. 14 reserved its judgement on whether or not to dismiss the case against Rimsha Masih, the young Christian girl accused of blasphemy in August. The IHC has not indicated when it expects to reach a decision.

Rimsha's actual trial has been on hold since September 28, when the IHC restrained the lower court from moving forward while it considered an application from her lawyers for the original charge to be annulled. They contend that the charge is fabricated and also cite the girl's age and learning difficulties as reasons for dismissal.

A revised charge sheet submitted by police in September indicated that no evidence had been found to support the accusation against Rimsha, who has been on bail for over two months.

Rimsha, who is deemed to be 14 years old but with a younger mental age, was charged with desecrating the Qur'an under section 295B of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC). Her case has attracted support from senior Islamic clerics in Pakistan, as well as a high level of international attention.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide's (CSW's) Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "Only a fortnight ago, during its Universal Periodic Review (UPR) at the UN, Pakistan cited the handling of Rimsha's case as a sign of positive change, in response to criticism of the country's blasphemy laws. Within Pakistan itself, the case has been held up as a clear example of misuse of the laws from the very beginning and there seems little point in prolonging the trial any further. We urge the competent authorities to annul the original charge without delay, sparing Rimsha any further ordeal in court and demonstrating that the early progress so strongly highlighted at Pakistan's UPR is a reality on the ground."