



4.2.14

## **PAKISTAN | Sawan Masih Appeals Blasphemy Death Sentence**

Sawan Masih, a Pakistani Christian man convicted of blasphemy charges and sentenced to death on March 27, filed an appeal against his conviction in the Lahore High Court on April 1.

Masih was accused of blasphemy under Section 295C of the Pakistan Penal Code on March 8, 2013. As news of the accusation spread, a mob of thousands targeted the Christian-majority area of Joseph Colony, Badami Bagh, Lahore, torching an estimated 198 properties on March 9, 2013.

Pakistan's blasphemy laws make it a criminal act to insult another's religion. Little evidence is required to register a case. False accusations are common and often used to settle personal scores, target religious minorities or further extremist agendas.

Statistically, most of those accused of blasphemy in Pakistan are from Muslim backgrounds, although religious minorities such as Christians make up a disproportionate number of victims. The life of the accused is at risk from sympathizers of the accuser as soon as the allegation is publically known, and even after acquittal. There is a de facto moratorium on the death penalty in Pakistan.

Andy Dipper, Chief Operating Officer of Christian Solidarity Worldwide, said, "We urge the authorities in Pakistan to secure a speedy and fair trial for Sawan Masih, and to ensure his safety in custody. It must be remembered that those responsible for burning down the homes in Joseph's Colony have not been brought to justice. The government must punish those who incite and enact such violence, in order to end the cycle of impunity that fuels blasphemy allegations."