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## PAKISTAN | Supreme Court Upholds Murder Conviction

Pakistan's Supreme Court decided on Oct. 7 to reverse an Islamabad High Court order from March 9 which dropped charges against Mumtaz Qadri under the Anti-Terrorism Act.

Mumtaz Qadri killed Salman Taseer, the former Governor of Punjab Province, on Jan. 4, 2011. A former member of Taseer's security team, Qadri confessed he killed Taseer because the former governor spoke out against the blasphemy laws and campaigned on behalf of Asiya Bibi, a Pakistani Christian woman accused of blasphemy. Taseer visited her in prison and gave her an assurance that she would receive a presidential pardon.

Qadri was charged under section 302 of the Pakistan Penal Code and Article 7 of the Anti-Terrorism Act. He was convicted and sentenced to death Oct. 1, 2011. He appealed the death penalty and the charges under the Anti-Terrorism Act at the Islamabad High Court on March 9. The Islamabad High Court dropped the charges under the Anti-Terrorism Act but upheld the death penalty in his case. During Qadri's appeal in the Supreme Court, Qadri's counsel argued he was justified in killing Taseer because Taseer had committed blasphemy by calling the blasphemy law a 'black law.' The Supreme Court judge remarked that criticism of the blasphemy law did not amount to blasphemy.

The Supreme Court ruling on Oct. 7 reverses the Islamabad High Court decision, reinstating the charges against Qadri under the Anti-Terrorism Act. The Supreme Court also stressed the need to exercise restraint since blasphemy cases are prone to misuse.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "While we welcome the Supreme Court decision to uphold Mumtaz Qadri's conviction, CSW does not endorse the use of the death penalty in any circumstance. We hope that this decision signals the start of a rational debate into much-needed reforms to the blasphemy laws and a move towards greater accountability of those who commit violence against religious minorities. The abuse of these laws has created an environment of intolerance and impunity in which people take the law into their own hands to settle personal scores, and in which Pakistan's religious minorities have faced widespread hostility and discrimination. As part of efforts to end religiously-motivated violence, the government should implement the Supreme Court's 2014 judgment, which called for, among other measures, the establishment of a special police taskforce to protect religious minorities."