

5 November 2018

## LAWASIA STATEMENT OF CONCERN REGARDING ACQUITTAL OF ASIA BIBI AND VIOLENT PROTESTS IN PAKISTAN

LAWASIA notes that, on 31 October 2018, the Supreme Court of Pakistan acquitted Asia Bibi of blasphemy charges and overturned the death sentence which had been imposed by the Lahore High Court.

LAWASIA expresses its deep concern over violent protests that have subsequently spread across Pakistan in response to the landmark ruling by the Supreme Court. Death threats from the protesters have put the lives of many in jeopardy, including Asia Bibi, her family and lawyers, as well as the judges who delivered the verdict.

LAWASIA is concerned that the protests have delayed Asia Bibi's release, given that Ms Bibi has served the better part of nine years in solitary confinement. Amid growing violence and threats to his life, LAWASIA is further dismayed that Ms Bibi's lawyer, Mr Saiful Mulook, has been forced to leave the country.

LAWASIA considers the violent demonstrations against the order of the Supreme Court to be an affront to the rule of law and the administration of justice in Pakistan. The rights of the acquitted, Asia Bibi, have been seriously threatened, as have the rights of her family and members of the legal profession.

LAWASIA draws attention to the rule of law as embedded in the Preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), by virtue of which Asia Bibi's acquittal by the Supreme Court of Pakistan must be fully implemented.

LAWASIA also draws attention to the right to life and security of person guaranteed by Article 3 of the UDHR, as well as by Article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Pakistan has been a party since 2010. Under the ICCPR, 'the obligation of States parties to respect and ensure the right to life extends to reasonably foreseeable threats and life-threatening situations that can result in loss of life.'<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Human Rights Committee, General comment No. 36 (2018) on article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, on the right to life, para 7.

In addition, in regard to threats made to lawyers and judges, LAWASIA draws attention to Article 17 of the UN Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers, which states:

*17. Where the security of lawyers is threatened as a result of discharging their functions, they shall be adequately safeguarded by the authorities.*

LAWASIA recognises the exemplary courage displayed by members of the Pakistan Bar and the judges in discharging their duties and in upholding the rule of law in adverse circumstances.

LAWASIA calls on the Pakistani authorities to ensure the safe release from incarceration of Asia Bibi, and to ensure the protection of all individuals concerned, including Asia Bibi, her family, her lawyers and the judges.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a long horizontal line with a small, stylized mark below it.

**Christopher Leong**  
President, LAWASIA