

**House Foreign Affairs Committee
Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission**

**Briefing
On
Human Rights and Religious Freedom – The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community**

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The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community is arguably the most persecuted Muslim community in the world. The U.S. State Department, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom and dozens of human rights non-governmental organizations have documented the systematic persecution endured by the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community at the hands of religious extremists and state institutions. Over the past several decades, hundreds of Ahmadi Muslims have been murdered in Pakistan, and dozens more in Bangladesh and Indonesia. Local government officials and vigilantes, largely emboldened by discriminatory and ambiguous legislation aimed against Ahmadis, have found ways to make worship and engagement with public life difficult or impossible.

While the persecution of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community is pervasive around the world, this testimony will highlight recent developments in Algeria, Indonesia, and Pakistan. Before recounting specific details about the persecution endured by the Community, we will first provide a brief overview of the Community that may help explain why the Community continues to be a prime target of extremists who purport to represent Islam.

Overview of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community¹

The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community is a dynamic, fast growing international revival movement within Islam. Founded in 1889, it spans over 195 countries and claims a membership exceeding tens of millions. Its current headquarters are in the United Kingdom.

The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community is the only Islamic organization to believe that the long-awaited messiah has come in the person of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (1835-1908) of Qadian. Ahmad claimed to be the metaphorical second coming of Jesus of Nazareth and the divine guide, whose advent was foretold by the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad. The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community believes that God sent Ahmad, like Jesus, to end religious wars, condemn bloodshed and reinstitute morality, justice and

¹ Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, Introduction from Official Website, www.alislam.org (last visited on July 1, 2018).

peace.

The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community is the leading Islamic organization to categorically reject terrorism in any form. Over a century ago, Ahmad emphatically declared that an aggressive “jihad by the sword” has no place in Islam. In its place, he taught his followers to wage a bloodless, intellectual “jihad of the pen” to defend Islam. His rigorous and rational defenses of Islam unsettled conventional Muslim thinking. As part of its efforts to revive Islam, the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community continues to spread Ahmad’s teachings of moderation and restraint in the face of bitter opposition from parts of the Muslim world.

Today, the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community continues to be an advocate for universal human rights and protections for religious and other minorities. It champions the empowerment and education of women. Its members are among the most law-abiding, educated and engaged Muslims in the world.

Finally, the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community is the foremost Islamic organization with a central spiritual leader. Over a century ago, Ahmad reminded his followers of God’s promise to safeguard the message of Islam through khilafat (the spiritual institution of successorship to prophethood). The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community believes that only spiritual successorship can uphold the true values of Islam and unite humanity. Five spiritual leaders have succeeded Ahmad since his demise in 1908. Its fifth and current spiritual head, His Holiness Mirza Masroor Ahmad, resides in the United Kingdom. Under the leadership of its spiritual successors, the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community has now built over 15,000 mosques, over 500 schools, and over 30 hospitals. The Community has translated the Holy Qur’an into over 60 languages. The Community propagates the true teachings of Islam and the message of peace and tolerance through a twenty-four hour satellite television channel (MTA), the Internet (alislam.org) and print (Islam International Publications).

With that critical background in mind, we will now highlight the rapidly deteriorating conditions for the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in Algeria, Indonesia, and Pakistan.

Persecution of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in Algeria

Since 2016, Algerian-Ahmadis have been the targets of an increasingly hostile governmental campaign, which has led to the arrest of dozens of Ahmadis and the destruction of Ahmadi buildings. In February 2016, the Community began building a center in the city of Blida. Four months later, the National Gendarmerie, acting on the orders of the Prime Minister, destroyed the building without any notice and simultaneously arrested nine Ahmadis.² Shortly thereafter, the government and media began – and continues to conduct – a full-scale, defamatory campaign against the

² Human Rights Without Frontiers: “Waves of Arrests of Ahmadis” <http://hrwf.eu/algeria-waves-of-arrests-of-ahmadis/> (Feb. 13, 2017).

community. The Prime Minister, Minister of Religious Affairs and Endowments, and the Minister of Interior have all made public statements denouncing the community in abusive terms, often on national television. Algeria's government controlled media has aired numerous television programs and published front-page articles leveling baseless accusations against the Community, ranging from insulting Prophet Muhammad, peace be on him, to planning to blow up a soccer stadium.

In 2017, the Algerian government conducted investigations of at least 205 Ahmadi Muslims men and women, students and elderly, arresting dozens.³ Charges included operating an unregistered religious association, collecting funds without authorization, and holding prayers in unauthorized locations. As of December 2017, five Ahmadi Muslims remained imprisoned. Approximately 30 others were found guilty but, as of October 2017, remained free while they appealed the charges.

Persecution of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in Indonesia

Government-sanctioned restrictions on the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in Indonesia have spurred provincial and local governments to take increasingly aggressive actions against the Community. A 2008 joint ministerial decree bans both proselytizing by the Ahmadi Muslim community and vigilantism against the group.⁴ Violations of the Ahmadi proselytizing ban carry a maximum five-year prison sentence on charges of blasphemy. The Indonesian Ulema Council ("MUI"), Indonesia's top clerical body issued a *fatwa* (religious edict) declaring the Ahmadiyya faith to be deviant and heretical. Some religious leaders and entire provinces, through the force of law, have expanded upon the MUI's *fatwa* by banning all Ahmadi activities. Since the 2008 decree and subsequent *fatwas*, authorities have closed or violent protestors have vandalized more than 100 Ahmadi mosques. For example, in February 2017, authorities closed the Al-Hidayah Mosque in Depok, West Java, and posted notice that all Ahmadi activities were "illegal" after hardliners threatened both the mosque and Ahmadis.

Ahmadis have reported difficulties obtaining ID cards, which negatively affects their ability to obtain marriage licenses and birth and death certificates, access public services, and freely travel throughout the country. The lack of an ID card also affects their ability to vote in the regional and national elections.

Persecution of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in Pakistan

For six decades, the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in Pakistan has endured wide-ranging abuses. An estimated 3-4 million Ahmadi Muslims currently live in Pakistan. Ahmadi Muslims profess to be Muslims, but their belief is criminalized under the law. The Second Amendment to Pakistan's Constitution, passed in 1974, explicitly

³ U.S. Department of State, International Religious Freedom Report for 2017 (Algeria), <https://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2017&dliid=280976#wrapper>.

⁴ U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, 2018 Annual Report (Indonesia), <http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/2018USCIRFAR.pdf>.

deprives members of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community of their right to self-identify as Muslims. Since the amendment's passage, over 300 Ahmadi Muslims have been killed.

Ahmadis face social, political, and economic discrimination and public allegations of blasphemy. For example, an 80-year-old Ahmadi bookseller named Abdul Shakoor has been imprisoned since 2015 on false blasphemy charges.⁵ Further, in 2014 police arrested four Ahmadi men based on allegations that they were removing posters in their neighborhood that featured anti-Ahmadi slogans; three were sentenced to death for blasphemy in October 2017, while the fourth man died in police custody.⁶

Ahmadis frequently face harassment and physical attacks, sometimes resulting in murder. For example, in Karachi, on three different days in June 2016, three Ahmadi doctors—Dr. Hameed Ahmed, Dr. Abdul Hasan Isphani, and Dr. Chaudhry Khaliq Ahmad—were shot and killed in targeted attacks; as of December 2016, no charges had been brought.⁷

Ahmadi mosques and historic sites are frequent targets of attacks. On December 13, 2016, in Chakwal, Punjab Province, several thousand people stormed an Ahmadiyya community mosque, firing weapons and wounding several worshippers before police were able to disperse the mob.⁸ Most recently, on May 24, 2018, a mob razed two historic Ahmadi sites in Sialkot, including a mosque and the historic residence of the Community's founder.⁹ Dozens of municipal officials were a part of the mob.

Conclusion

We have provided only a basic sketch of the current persecution of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community in Algeria, Indonesia, and Pakistan. Our Community endures significant persecution throughout much of the rest of the Islamic world, including the Middle East (e.g., Egypt, UAE, and Palestine), Central Asia (e.g., Kazakhstan and Kyrgyz Republic) and Southeast Asia (e.g., Malaysia). In all instances, the primary source of our Community's persecution is religious extremists who espouse a militant perversion of Islam. Our Community strongly believes that all such religious extremism must be cut at its root.

Our Community welcomes and lauds any and all efforts to raise greater awareness about restrictions to religious freedom in all over the world.

Thank you.

⁵ Prisoners of Conscience: Abdul Shakoor, U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, <http://www.uscifr.gov/abdul-shakoor>.

⁶ U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, 2018 Annual Report (Pakistan), <http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/2018USCIRFAR.pdf>

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ Mob attacks historic Ahmadi worship place in Sialkot, The Express Tribune (May 24, 2018), <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1717928/1-mob-razes-historic-ahmadi-property-sialkot/>

