



Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Briefing

Co-hosted by the Congressional Ahmadiyya Muslim Caucus

Human Rights and Religious Freedom – The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community

Thursday, June 28th, 2018

10:00 – 11:00 a.m.

2255 Rayburn House Office Building

Opening Remarks as Prepared for Delivery

Good morning. I am pleased to welcome our distinguished panelists and all of you in the audience to our briefing on the human rights and religious freedom issues facing the Ahmadiyya Muslim community.

I also welcome Jackie Speier, my colleague, fellow member of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, and Co-Chair of the Congressional Ahmadiyya Muslim Caucus. Our thanks to the Caucus for co-hosting this event today.

And I'd like to express my appreciation to my constituents who have kept me informed about the discrimination that Ahmadiyya Muslims face around the world.

The Ahmadiyya Muslim movement originated in northern India in the late 19th century. Its founder, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad saw himself as a renewer of Islam chosen by Allah. Ahmadiyya Islam stresses non-violence, religious toleration, and places a high priority on the building of mosques, schools and hospitals.

Unfortunately, some Muslims view Ahmadiyya Islam as heretical because it recognizes a prophet following Muhammad. This has led to persecution and discrimination against Ahmadiyya Muslims worldwide.

In Pakistan, a 1974 constitutional amendment declared Ahmadis non-Muslims. A decade later, new laws banned Ahmadis from identifying themselves as Muslims, calling their places of worship mosques, and propagating their faith in “any way, directly or indirectly.” They are barred from reciting the Koran or using traditional Islamic greetings.

Ahmadis in Pakistan are also some of the most common defendants in criminal charges of blasphemy, which can carry the death penalty. They have been targeted under Pakistan’s anti-terrorism laws. Attacks committed against them by mobs and militant groups take place with impunity.

I want to mention one man in particular who’s been the victim of this legal discrimination.

Abdul Shakoor is an 80-year old bookseller from the city of Rabwah, where many Ahmadis reside.

In 2015, police raided Abdul’s shop, arrested him, and accused him of selling an Ahmadiyya commentary on the Qur’an, among other publications. Authorities charged him with “printing, publishing, or disseminating any material to incite hatred,” and “insulting religion.” He’s serving a combined eight years in prison on these charges.

Abdul is a prisoner of conscience in the Human Rights Commission’s Defending Freedoms Project, but he does not yet have a Congressional advocate. I encourage the offices here today to consider taking up his case. By advocating for Abdul, Members can both shine a light on the treatment of Ahmadis in Pakistan and make a tangible difference in Abdul’s life.

We’ve also seen an uptick in the persecution of the Ahmadiyya community in Algeria and Indonesia.

Ahmadi leaders in Algeria were arrested and imprisoned in 2017, and the community continues to face stigmatization in the press, and harassment and threats of arrest by police.

Ahmadis in Indonesia have been declared “non-Islamic, deviant and misled” by national Islamic authorities, and face legal restrictions and mob attacks.

We will hear about the institutionalized discrimination against Ahmadis in greater detail from our panelists today. I look forward to their recommendations for what more Congress can be doing to help safeguard the human rights and religious freedom of this community.

I turn now to Waris Husain of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, who will introduce our panelists and moderate the discussion.