



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on May 8, 2019

## Asia Bibi, Pakistani Christian Once Convicted of Blasphemy, Arrives Safely in Canada

Asia Bibi, a Pakistani Christian woman once convicted of blasphemy against Islam, has reached safety in Canada more than six months after her conviction was overturned by Pakistan's Supreme Court.

According to the [Associated Press](#):

A close friend of Bibi confirmed that she had left the country. He spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisal. Bibi's lawyer, Saif-ul Malook, said Bibi had already arrived in Canada and officials in Pakistan's interior and foreign ministries also confirmed her departure. They spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to brief the media.



Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau declined to comment on the matter Wednesday, citing "privacy and security issues."

Bibi's daughters were already living in Canada, where they and she have been granted asylum.

"Hundreds" of Pakistanis, including "scores of Christians," have been convicted under Pakistan's strict blasphemy laws in recent decades, reported the [BBC](#). At least 65 "blasphemers" have reportedly been killed since 1990. Bibi was the first woman ever convicted under these laws.

Her ordeal began in 2009, when some Muslim women with whom she was harvesting berries — and who had already punished her for being a Christian by forcing her to pick more fruit to earn the same wages as they earned — refused to drink from a cup she had used because her infidel status made it "unclean." They began insulting her and told her she should convert to Islam.

"I'm not going to convert," Bibi [said](#). "I believe in my religion and in Jesus Christ, who died on the cross for the sins of mankind. What did your Prophet Mohammed ever do to save mankind? And why should it be me that converts instead of you?"

Five days later, she was attacked at her home and arrested, supposedly having confessed to blasphemy. She was convicted and kept for nine years in what she described as "a tiny, windowless cell," waiting to be executed.

While Bibi languished on death row, two government officials who defended her were assassinated.

Last Halloween, Pakistan's high court overturned Bibi's conviction. Islamist hardliners rioted, forcing the government to keep Bibi in a secure, undisclosed location while the court's decision was appealed.

In January, a three-judge panel of the Supreme Court [upheld Bibi's acquittal](#), saying that the testimony against her was inconsistent and, in some cases, fabricated and that her alleged confession was



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inadmissible because it had been coerced. Chief Justice Asif Saeed Khan Khosa maintained that some of Bibi's accusers should have been given life sentences for perjury, though this did not happen because it would surely have led to widespread violence and possibly even the overthrow of the government.

Despite two decisions in her favor, the fear of violence, possibly combined with antipathy from senior members of the military, [prevented Bibi's escape from Pakistan](#). She remained in her undisclosed location even as her health was reportedly deteriorating rapidly.

Today, however, Bibi is safe and no longer has to fear for her life (though she may find her new home to be a bit [less than hospitable](#) toward Christians, too).

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, in a [statement](#) issued Wednesday, said, "The United States welcomes the news that Asia Bibi has safely reunited with her family.... Asia Bibi is now free, and we wish her and her family all the best following their reunification. The United States uniformly opposes blasphemy laws anywhere in the world, as they jeopardize the exercise of fundamental freedoms."

British Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt [tweeted](#) that Bibi's arrival in Canada was "fantastic news," adding that he was preparing to meet with Pompeo "about persecution of Christians around the world."

Bibi's escape is an important victory, but the fight against Islamic blasphemy laws is far from over. Shaan Taseer, whose father was one of the officials killed for defending Bibi, told the AP that "there are hundreds more people languishing in Pakistani jails on charges of blasphemy."

"It is a great day, a great moment but let's not forget the 200 other Asia Bibis in jail today on charges of blasphemy," he said. "These are the people on the front line.... These are the soldiers against extremism. They are facing the enemy up close and personal."

*2010 photo of Asia Bibi: AP Images*



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