



Written by [James Heiser](#) on February 7, 2011

Death Remains Pakistan's Penalty for Blasphemy Against Mohammed

Rehman's resolve to reform Pakistan's penal code was undermined not only by the murder of Salman Taseer — the Governor of Punjab and a fellow reformer — but also by death threats that targeted her.

Furthermore, Rehman's own party, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), refused to support her legislation.

According to [a report from CNSNews.com](#), Pakistan's Prime Minister fundamentally undermined any effort at reform:



Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani assured a gathering of Muslim leaders last month that the government has no plans to change the blasphemy laws. He subsequently disbanded a committee that had been established to determine how to amend the legislation.

In a statement Thursday, Rehman said she had little choice but to abide by the party's decision, but warned that "appeasement of extremism is a policy that will have its blow-back."

Developments in Pakistan since last month's assassination of Governor Taseer have demonstrated that several segments of Pakistani society that were once believed to be open to reform are actually overwhelmingly supportive of a radically Islamist legal code. Approximately [500 religious leaders](#) who were purportedly moderate immediately came to the defense of Taseer's assassin, maintaining that anyone who was believed to have supported blasphemers shared their guilt. Then [a thousand Pakistani lawyers](#) — despite their reputation as a "moderate" force in modern Pakistan — signed a petition offering to defend the assassin.

Rehman's decision to abandon reform of one of the more vicious aspects of Pakistan's penal code means that the Christian minority may expect to be subjected to further persecution. [According to a story for Christianity Today-India](#), the Center for Legal Aid, Assistance and Settlement (CLAAS) will continue trying to defend Pakistani Christians, despite this tragic setback:

CLAAS, which provides free legal assistance to persecuted Christians in Pakistan, said there was now little hope that the situation would improve for the country's Christian minority.

Nasir Saeed, Coordinator of CLAAS UK, said: "We are very disappointed by Sherry Rehman's decision to abandon her Bill. The Pakistani government has proved itself incapable of seeking equal rights for religious minorities and unwilling to work towards amending the draconian blasphemy law. It is sadly a sign of how far from democratic values and religious tolerance Pakistan is."



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Persecuted Christians in Pakistan deserve to be heard and they deserve the rights enjoyed by others in their own country. We will continue to put pressure on the Pakistani government to change this law and its unfair application."

A Pakistani woman sentenced to stoning for adultery: AP Images



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