



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on January 30, 2019

Pakistani Christian Freed After Eight Years on Death Row for Blasphemy

A Christian woman who spent eight years on Pakistan's death row after being convicted of blasphemy is free after the country's Supreme Court upheld its earlier acquittal of her Tuesday.

Asia Bibi, now 47, was accused of blasphemy in 2009 for daring to defend herself and her faith from Muslims' vile insults. She had been out picking berries with other women on a hot summer day when she took a drink from a well. A Muslim woman, seeing this, announced that no one else could drink from the cup because Bibi had made it "unclean." (Bibi, by [her own account](#), had already been punished for being a Christian by being forced to pick more berries than other women in order to earn the same wages.)



"I think Jesus would see it differently from Mohammed," Bibi replied.

"How dare you think for the Prophet, you filthy animal!" the woman retorted.

Soon others began hurling insults at Bibi. The woman who had started it all told her she should convert to Islam.

"I'm not going to convert," Bibi shot back. "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?"

Bibi suffered physical abuse and was arrested and hauled before the courts, which found her guilty of blasphemy, a capital offense in Pakistan. She was kept in what she called "a tiny, windowless cell" and fully expected to be executed or to die waiting.

Then something miraculous happened: Pakistan's Supreme Court overturned her sentence on, of all days, last Halloween.

Unfortunately, the reaction to that decision kept Bibi from being free to leave the country and join her children in Canada, where they have been granted asylum. Thousands of Islamist protestors took to the streets. Bibi, her lawyer, and the Supreme Court justices were all threatened with death. (Two government officials who stuck up for her had already been killed.) The radicals filed an appeal for a review of the ruling, forcing Bibi to remain in Pakistan, where she resided "at an undisclosed location protected by Pakistani security forces who have kept her confined to her quarters, unable to even open a window," reported the [Associated Press](#).

Now she is finally allowed to leave, and according to a friend who spoke to the AP on condition of



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anonymity, rejoining her children is her top priority.

"I am really grateful to everybody. Now after nine years it is confirmed that I am free and I will be going to hug my daughters," the friend quoted Bibi as saying.

According to the AP:

Pakistan's Chief Justice Asif Saeed Khan Khosa, who led the panel that upheld Bibi's acquittal, said in court that Bibi's accusers were guilty of perjury and that if the case had not been so sensitive, they should have been jailed for life.

"The image of Islam we are showing to the world gives me much grief and sorrow," Khosa said.

Much of the evidence presented against Bibi was suspicious, and some of it appeared to be fabricated, he said, adding that the cleric who lodged the initial charge of blasphemy gave contradictory statements that were unchallenged in the trial.

Bibi's lawyer, Saiful Malook, praised the ruling, saying the three-judge panel that upheld the acquittal had "insisted on very strict proofs of blasphemy" that were not forthcoming.

Michael Kugelman, deputy director of the Asia Program at the Washington-based Wilson Center, called it a "milestone" and a "legal watershed."

The radical Islamists, on the other hand, despised the outcome. Mohammad Shafiq Amini, acting chief of the Tehreek-e-Labbaik party, said the decision was "cruel and unjust" and called on supporters to protest. However, this time the country's security forces were ready for protests and had even arrested many party activists Monday, preventing major uprisings.

Bibi's long nightmare is finally over, but other Pakistani Christians still live in fear of being executed for blasphemy. The court's decision might have a "deterrent effect," human-rights activist Tahira Abdullah told the AP, "but knowing the political mileage to be gained from false charges of blasphemy, I doubt it."

Screenshot of Asia Bibi (center): [Screenshot of TRT World youtube video](#)



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