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8 December 2021

Joint statement on the killing of Priyantha Kumara

We, the undersigned, condemn the brutal murder of Priyantha Kumara on 3 December 2021 in Sialkot, Pakistan. Kumara, a Sri Lankan national, was [lynched](#) and his body set alight by a mob after allegations of blasphemy were reportedly levelled against him.

Kumara's murder is not an isolated incident, but the latest episode of an ongoing and increasing pandemic of violence perpetrated in the name of religion. According to the Centre for Social Justice (Pakistan), at least 81 people accused of blasphemy have been extralegally killed in Pakistan since 1994.

The spike in such violence coincides with blasphemy becoming a [capital offence](#) under Pakistani law. Blasphemy has been criminalised in Pakistan since Partition; however, the introduction of the discretionary death penalty for blasphemy in 1986 (which became mandatory in 1991) appears to have inflamed religious tensions in the country. Since then, the number of blasphemy accusations has soared, with the Centre for Social Justice (Pakistan) documenting a record [200 cases in 2020](#) alone. It has been suggested that the State's strict anti-death penalty stance—of which the hundreds of death sentences meted out are illustrative—and paradoxical reluctance to carry out executions on this basis have encouraged civilians to take matters into their own hands, [inspiring vigilante justice](#).

Pakistani authorities have been widely criticised for failing to address, and in some cases even endorsing, such violence. Amnesty International has [stated](#) that 'the lack of a consistent, robust and timely response by the authorities to situations of developing mob violence... and the failure to prosecute rigorously and promptly those responsible, leads to a climate of impunity which can provide fertile ground for further such attacks'.

We call on Pakistan to take urgent steps to realise justice for Kumara and his family, and to address the deep-seated legal and sociocultural issues of which this crime is a symptom. Failure to act would render the authorities as having acquiesced to, or being complicit in, killings of this nature. In the short term, we welcome Prime Minister Imran Khan's decision to oversee a comprehensive and impartial investigation of Kumara's murder and hold his assailants accountable by full and fair operation of criminal justice processes.

Looking forward, we call on the government of Pakistan to:

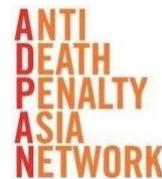
1. Take steps to [reform its blasphemy framework](#), including the abolition of the death penalty for blasphemy, in a manner that is both compliant with international human rights law and accommodating of societal sensitivities.
2. Recognise that in addition to legal reform, administrative and educational measures must be taken to end the climate of fear and the impunity with which blasphemy-related violence is committed.

Signed

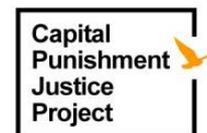
- Centre for Social Justice (Pakistan)



- Anti-Death Penalty Asia Network (ADPAN)



- Capital Punishment Justice Project (CPJP)



- Eleos Justice

