

ACAT (Harrow group) – prayer case of the month (November 2019)

Please pray as you feel led for **Shagufta Kausar** and her husband **Shafqat Emmanuel** - Christians facing the death penalty in Pakistan for ‘blasphemy’.



They were arrested and convicted after allegedly sending text messages offensive to Muslims in June 2013 to two people, one being the prayer leader at the mosque. The texts were sent from a number registered in Shagufta's name. The messages were written in English, but Shagufta and Shafqat have said they could not have written the texts because they are illiterate. They are unable to write proper Urdu, let alone English. They claimed they lost the phone in question before the texts were sent, and that the SIM card in it was not theirs. In April 2014 a court in Punjab Province, sentenced them to death. Lawyer Nadeem Hassan claimed that to appease the angry crowds, the police tortured Shafqat into confessing before a judicial magistrate that he had sent the messages. Shafqat told lawyers that the police tortured him in front of his wife and children, and threatened to torture his wife if he did not confess. He said, 'To save my wife, I confessed.' Throughout the trial the complainants' lawyers intimidated the judge by repeatedly proclaiming Quranic references calling for death to blasphemers.

Shafqat is paralysed from the waist down, having fractured his spine in an accident in 2004. He and Shagufta lived with their children in a church compound in Gojra, Punjab Province, and she supported the family by working as a cleaner. They are being held in different prisons about 250 km apart: Shagufta is in Multan Gaol, now in the same cell where Asia Bibi was held. Shafqat has spent months in hospital because of extremely painful bedsores all over his body. The couple's four children (aged 10-15) have had to be moved to another area following huge protests over the incident.

Saiful Malook, the lawyer (a Muslim) who in the end successfully fought for Asia Bibi's release, has now become involved in their case and has stated, *"They did not get a fair trial. They are innocent."*