

## ACAT (Harrow group) – prayer case of the month (*December 2020*)

Please pray as you feel led for **Asif Pervaiz** (37), a Christian father of four from Lahore in northeast Pakistan, who was accused of sending blasphemous text messages in October 2013 and has been in prison ever since. In September 2020, he was sentenced to death. Fearing for their lives, his wife and children have gone into hiding.



Asif's accuser was his former supervisor in a garment factory. The charge levelled against him falls under sections 295-A, 295-B and 295-C of the Pakistan Penal code, which criminalises blasphemy and carries the death penalty. Allegations involving mobile phones have been used in a number of other cases involving Christians. According to the defence, the charge was in fact an act of revenge: **Asif Pervaiz** stated that he had been falsely accused after refusing his supervisor's constant pressure to convert to Islam. He said that due to this harassment he was forced to leave his job at the factory. The Lahore court ruled that even though there was no evidence of personal implication, Asif had not offered sufficient evidence of innocence.

**Asif Pervaiz** is represented by Saif-ul Malook, who was also legal counsel for Asia Bibi, and he has said: "The evidence on record was clearly not enough to sentence **Asif Pervaiz** to death. As usual, trial judges have so far never acquitted anyone accused of blasphemy. I hope he will be freed by the High Court where we have filed an appeal. Sadly, Asif will continue to be incarcerated until his appeal is heard. From my experience in the Asia Bibi case, judges in appeal courts hesitate to hear and decide blasphemy cases".

*Asif is one of prisoners featured in ACAT-UK's Greetings Card campaign. If you would like to, you can send a NON-RELIGIOUS card or greeting to him. Do not mention ACAT.*

*Asif Pervaiz, Lahore District Jail, Ferozpur Road, Shadman 1, Lahore, Punjab 54000, Pakistan*

Update: IRAN. Imprisoned human rights lawyer Nasrin Soudoudeh (our prayer case in July 2019) was temporarily released in November and it is hoped, but not certain, that she will not be returned to prison.