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## **Blasphemy case registered against 55 Christians in Chak no. 206 District Faisalabad**

On September 04, 2014 at about 11:00 a m Mr. Joseph Francis MBE (National Director CLAAS) was informed through a phone call about a registered blasphemy case in the Police Station Murid Wala against 55 Christian residents of a small village Chak no. 206 of Tehsil Samandri District Faisalabad by the local Muslims. Police was raiding the Christian houses, threatened them for their lives and arrested fourteen Christians the same evening. The Christians were afraid and worried about the arrested because of the previous incidents while the people were murdered even in the police custody after falsely accused of blasphemy the most draconian law, the source said.



Keeping the sensitivity of the issue in mind the same day at 01:00 p.m. CLAAS team headed by Mr. Joseph Francis MBE (National Director CLAAS), including Ms. Katherine Sapna (Program Officer) Ms. Rama Rasheed (Assistant Program Officer) Mr. Sohail Habel (Finance Manager) and Mr. Hunny Bashir (Assistant in-charge Legal Department) rushed towards the occurrence place to collect the real facts behind the registered case. At 05:30 p.m. the team arrived at Murid

Wala Police Station and met Muhammad Yar Wattoo the investigation officer of the said case.

### **Statement of Muhammad Yar Wattoo:**

The investigation officer said that it is a very primary stage as the FIR was registered just a day before. He could not investigate the matter because of his business in another murder case but he assured that he will do the fair investigation as he feel himself that there are some lacunas in the case. CLAAS Director suggested the SHO and the IO that 295-C cannot be charged on the Christians as the statement of the FIR was about the illegal encroachment of Christians over the Old graveyard related to Muslims.

After long time arguments the SHO understand the matter and then he asked to the Investigation officer to change the section 295-C in the FIR according to the supplementary statement and he added section 297 of the Pakistan Penal Code. CLAAS team again suggested the SHO and IO that there is nothing happened like blasphemy therefore any section regarding blasphemy do not fall in the FIR.

SHO assured his full cooperation to Christian brothers and said that he would try his best for the reconciliation between local Christians and Muslims. It is a property matter of an old graveyard and their occurred a misunderstanding between the parties he added. IO said that he will released all innocent people after completing the investigation and assured the team that Christians are safe and he will handle the matter peacefully.

Mr. Joseph Francis asked permission for meeting the arrested Christians in the police station, which was granted.

The SHO asked CLAAS team that the Christians who are not arrested should apply for their pre-arrest bails and come to the police station to join investigation, meanwhile police will see the way how the Muslim could be agree for compromise in this case.

### **Meeting with the arrested people:**



While meeting the arrested people in the police station Mr. Joseph Francis assured them that CLAAS is there to support them at any stage and also give them courage that they do not need to be afraid. Talking to them Mr. Francis said that CLAAS will provide them free legal assistance and all kind of moral support they need during their imprisonment in the police lock up. The victims complained that they are hungry as they were get arrested at mid night but did not

provided food for breakfast and lunch as it was evening, they eat nothing. They said that the family members are afraid of the attitude of the Muslims and they are not coming out of their houses and to the police station to provide them food.

CLAAS team arranged food for them and also gave some money to buy food from the police Cafeteria.

The Christians informed the team that they all are innocent and the incident occurred because of misunderstanding for which they have been apologized repeatedly but the

Muslims falsely implicating them in to blasphemy case. They also informed that a Muslim landlord/Chaudhry named Wasif Iqbal s/o Haji Iqbal is supporting Christians, but no one from the Christian NGO,s come to them to support them. They are worried about their families as they do not feel them secure, they added. Mr. Joseph Francis assured the team that they will be released soon and they should not be worried about the charges of 295-C because it has been removed from FIR.

CLAAS team was worried about Mohson s/o Safdar Masih (late) aged 12 and student of grade 9<sup>th</sup> who was in the police lock up. When the team asked the police about the arrest of Mohson he said that he will be released soon and handed over to his mother as his father passed away earlier this incident.

### **Area back ground:**



More than 350 Christian families living in Chak no. 206, Tehsil Samandri District Faisalabad who lived among above 1000 Muslim families rich and landlords. Christians are populated in this area before the partition of Indo-Pak and since then they had a few Marla's of land for Christian graveyard by the Numberdar of the village while the Muslims were allotted with 24 Acre land for graveyard.

Presently the Christian's were facing problems in burial of their dead bodies.

They did not have enough place in the graveyard and using the land twice or third time to make graves of their beloveds.

They shared their concern with a Muslim land owner Ch. Muhammad Wasif s/o Haji Iqbal to help them in this regard. He suggested Christians to use the land of 50 years old Muslim's graveyard which was not in the use of Muslims and was Wasif's property. But he did not issue them any legal document yet.

### **Incident**

On September 3, 2014 at 9:00 a.m. a group of few Christians went to the place/graveyard with tractor and started to level the surface of the land and build the boundary wall. After they finished work in the disputed graveyard they were on the way to home at about 2:00 p.m. when they were attacked by a Muslim group Ashiq Hussain, Qaiser, Muhammad Shahbaz, Liaqat Ali, Waqas s/o Liaqat Ali, Muhammad Yasin s/o Muhammad Sadiq, Muhammad Naseem s/o Muhammad Ali, Muhammad Amjad





After long arguments Christians admitted their mistake and made an apology. They went back to the graveyard and break the wall which they made as boundary. Meanwhile Muslims gave an application against 55 Christians by name in the police Station Murid Wala secretly and alleged them for blasphemy and other criminal offences. Muslims asked to the local police to get registered a case FIR No. is 316/14 offence under section 295-C, 506-B, 447, 148, 149 while the Christians were unaware about the registered case. Police started raiding the houses of Christians early in the morning at 4:00 a.m. to get them arrested. Police came to the village break the gates of Christian houses and arrested fourteen Christians men namely Phool Masih s/o Manzoor Masih, Haroon Masih s/o Robin Masih, Farid Masih s/o Nazir Masih, Bagga Masih s/o Khursheed Masih, Arshad Masih s/o Aslam Masih, Waris Masih S/o Khursheed Masih, Mushtaq Masih s/o Bhagtu Masih, Nazir Masih s/o Gundu Masih, Arshad Masih s/o Liaqat Masih, Tariq Masih s/o Ichhar Masih, Zulfiqar Masih s/o Jeeb Masih, Arshad Masih S/o Sharif Masih, Hanif Masih s/o Fazal Masih, and Mohson Masih s/o Safdar Masih (Late) aged 12 and student of 9<sup>th</sup> grades and confined them in police lock up. The remaining Christians and their families were frightened because of blasphemy charge and escaped from their houses for safety as they were threatened by Muslims to give fire to their houses. They were also worried about the life of arrested in the police station as there are several incidents when Christians were murdered in Blasphemy cases while in the police custody.

### **Demands of CLAAS team:**

Mr. Joseph Francis MBE urged police to remove 295-C PPC from the registered FIR because it was a very sensitive and different issue which was not applicable in this matter. He suggested police to add 297 PPC which is specifically used for the disgrace of graves. Mr. Francis argued over the difference between 295-C and 297 PPC for three hours and after long discussion CLAAS team was succeeded to motivate police to delete the section 295-C which is non-bail able and the punishment is death penalty. Police also added 297 PPC in the FIR a bail able offence and the punishment is not severe. CLAAS team asked police to call upon the both parties and settle the matter in the police station because the Christians were ready to apology for what they did as they do not wanted to hurt any one's feelings. Therefore there should compromise between both parties to make good environment in the village to live long, CLAAS team demanded.

## **Team Observation:**

- Christians in this area are deprived of their equal rights and neglected by the Member Provincial Assembly and Member National Assembly and other influenced people to address their issues such like graveyard.
- Christian leadership did not try to ask seriously the relevant authorities to allot a piece of land for their graveyard.
- In the areas of District Faisalabad, blasphemy law is used as a weapon by the public at large.
- Team observed that Muslims deliberately involved Christians in 295-C, and being under pressure the police has to put this charge in the FIR although they were aware that it was a severe allegation.
- CLAAS team is not fully satisfied with the police cooperation and do not have trust because of the bad experience in many previous cases when the police ignored the human rights and pleased Muslim religious parties by hurting Christians or other minority groups.
- If the police have any soft corner for Christian community or they agree and believe on compromise between parties to live jointly then what was the reason that police arrested as many Christians including Mohson aged 12 a minor and student of grade 9.
- Police need training workshops on human rights and need education about laws and the sections to use rightly in the offenses.

**Reported by:**  
**CLAAS-Pakistan**