



# The Church of Scotland

MODERATOR OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

SMB/CAM

14 November 2018

Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP  
Home Secretary  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF

Dear Home Secretary,

## **Asylum in the United Kingdom: Asia Bibi**

As Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, in concert with the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Scotland and the College of Bishops of the Scottish Episcopal Church and other ecumenical partners, I write to express our deep concern about the case of Asia Bibi.

You will be aware that in 2009 Asia Bibi was charged with committing blasphemy following an argument with neighbours.

In 2010, she was found guilty and sentenced to death under Pakistan's harsh Blasphemy Law and spent eight years in detention, much of it in solitary confinement.

Asia was acquitted on 31 October 2018.

Although she has been reportedly reunited with her husband and three children she needs round the clock protection as Tehreek-e-Labbaik has called for her to be hanged and there have been several cases of extra-judicial killings of people charged with blasphemy in Pakistan.

The threat to Asia and her family and supporters is real.

We are dismayed that over the weekend the UK Government announced they would not grant asylum to Asia and her family over fears of unrest in this country.

It is still not clear if or when Asia and her family will be able to leave Pakistan.

We continue to be deeply concerned about the fate of the Umeed Bakhsh family in Glasgow, about whom the Moderator wrote to you on 10 October 2018.

Maqsood is a qualified and experienced engineer, his wife Parveen is a midwife and both could contribute much to society in this country.

Their sons, Somer and Areeb, are flourishing and, despite the stresses the family are under

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Scottish Charity Number: SC011353

and the conditions in which they live, consider Scotland their home.

The root cause is, of course, Pakistan's Blasphemy Laws and we urge the UK Government to do all in their power to advocate for these laws to be amended to prevent their misuse and to promote tolerance and harmony between faith communities.

For example, the content of Pakistani public school text books related to non-Islamic faiths promotes a sense of distrust, portraying non-Muslim citizens of Pakistan as being sympathetic towards perceived enemies.

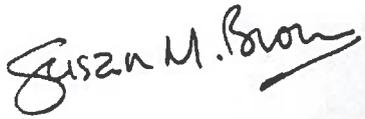
Scottish churches have connections with Pakistan that go back to 1857.

We stand with the Christian community in Pakistan and request that the UK Government takes action to protect minority faith communities and ensure justice for all.

With all respect, we urge you and through you, the Home Office, to grant asylum to Asia Bibi and her family in recognition of the United Kingdom's continuing commitment to freedom of religion and belief.

This case has put into sharp focus the dangers facing Christians in Pakistan and to that end we would implore you to grant the Umeed Bakhsh family the right to remain in the United Kingdom.

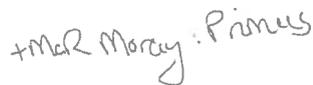
Yours sincerely,



**Rt Revd Susan Brown**  
**Moderator**  
**General Assembly of the Church of Scotland**



**The Most Revd Leo Cushley**  
**Archbishop of St Andrews and Edinburgh**



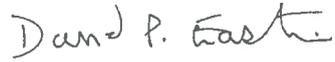
**The Most Revd Mark Strange**  
**Primus, Scottish Episcopal Church**



**Ms Adwoa Bittle**  
**Clerk of the General Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends**



**Mr John P Cross**  
**Moderator of the United Free Church of Scotland**



**Revd Dr David P Easton**  
**Chair of the Synod of the Methodist Church in Scotland**



**Revd Dr David Pickering**  
**Moderator, United Reformed Church National Synod of Scotland**