



October 7, 2005: Mandi Bahauddin, Pakistan, 8 Ahmadiis gunned down in Mosque during morning prayers

“In Germany, the Nazis came for the Communists and I did not speak up because I was not a Communist. Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak up because I was not a Jew. Then they came for the trade unionists and I did not speak up because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for the Catholics and I was a Protestant so I did not speak up. Then they came for me....by that time there was no one to speak up for anyone.”

Attributed to Martin Niemoller (1892-1984)

A World Unsafe for Diversity

When a government establishes itself under a particular religion, where one faith has a privileged status over others, it brings upon itself the task of defining who belongs to that favored religion, and who does not. This is the current predicament in several established Muslim and Muslim majority countries, like Pakistan, Bangladesh, Malaysia and Indonesia, in which Ahmadi Muslims have been systematically denied certain privileges, and harassment has ranged from public protest to murder. One has only to view part 16.c. of the Visa application (<http://www.pakistan-embassy.org/forms>) on the Pakistan Embassy web site to witness the extent to which the Ahmadi exclusion has penetrated.

The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community was founded in 1889 by Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, who was born and raised in the village of Qadian, India in approximately 1836. Ahmad was a dedicated student of Islam who, following years of comparative analysis of other religions, declared forcefully the righteousness of Islam and the teachings of Muhammad. His problems with credence came when he proclaimed himself the Messiah promised by various world religions, e.g., the Mahdi or Mujaddid (reformer of the age) in Islam, Christ's second coming in Christianity, seemingly contradicting the Islamic tenet that Muhammad was the final prophet. He also drew ire by stating that Jesus had died before rising to heaven, years after

having survived the cross, contrary to the common Muslim belief that he had risen while still alive. Though Ahmad delivered no new Islamic laws, nor called himself the successor to the prophet Muhammad, he and his followers were called heretic by other Muslims. Two distinct Ahmadi groups formed following the death of Ahmad: one of which denies Ahmad to have been an actual prophet (the Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement) and the other of which, the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, claims that, while Ahmad was indeed a prophet, Muhammad is still the “final law-bearing prophet” in that his status and word supersede any other’s authority. Today, both groups draw more than criticism and debate, as once again we see human intolerance for diversity, leading to gross discrimination.

Ahmadis in Pakistan have faced numerous and sometimes deadly vigilante attacks. Early Sunday morning, on February 24, 2008 in Karachi Pakistan a 45 year old Ahmadi man named Basharat Ahmed Mughal was shot and killed on his way to his place of worship. According to a report on ThePersecution.org, “Police registered a case against unknown suspects at the Mehmoodabad police station.” The International Press and Media Desk of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Association in London reported that Mughal was the President of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community Halqa Manzoor Colony in Karachi, Pakistan. He was shot dead on his way to Fajr prayers.” On March 1, 2007, in Seerah, District Mandi Bahauddin, Muhammad Ashraf was shot and killed by confessed murderer Riaz Gondal, who told the Qadirabad police that he killed Ashraf for changing his faith from Sunni to Ahmadi, according to the Pakistan Daily Times of March 2. And on April 8, 2007 an 82 year old Chaudhry Habibullah Sial was found murdered in his home, which had been used as a prayer center for Ahmadis. ThePersecution.org reports that there have been 87 religiously based murders of Ahmadis in Pakistan since 1984. There have also been numerous attacks of mosques, burnings of prayer mats and protests by Muslim clerics seeking to ban Ahmadi practices.

The election process in Pakistan has been used to systematically repress Ahmadi participation in Pakistan society. In the Election 2002, the Election Commission introduced two separate forms for registration of voters, one for Muslims (Form 2) and another (Form 8) for non-Muslims, and forced Ahmadis to use only Form 8. This effectively kept Ahmadis from voting because voting non-Muslim would indicate disassociating themselves from the prophet Muhammad, which most were unwilling to do. Since then, Form 8 has been abandoned and Form 2 has been redesigned to require the voter to indicate by checking a box their religious affiliation. Ahmadis cannot select the Muslim box because anyone who does so must sign a proclamation on the back of the form which ends in, “None of us is associated with the Qadiani or Lahori group, or calls himself an Ahmadi.”

Josh White, with the Institute for Global Engagement, spent much of 2006 in Pakistan’s North-West Province, returning for shorter periods in 2007 and 2008. He was part of a U.S. sponsored election observer delegation and describes the process as a two-tiered system in which the main election is for Muslim seats, candidates for which anyone can vote, and then the elected Muslims choose candidates from the minority groups. Mr. White said, “Under this system, the mainstream parties can’t ignore the minority groups, but the minority groups don’t get to choose who their best representative is.” He added that, “Our team saw what appeared to be numerous problems with the voting lists and often people were not able to find

their names on the appropriate list, arriving at one polling station only to be told their name is on a list at another polling station in another part of town.”

The 2006 International Religious Freedom Report on Pakistan by the U.S. Department of State indicates, “The (Pakistani) constitution states that ‘subject to law, public order and morality, every citizen shall have the right to profess, practice, and propagate his religion;’ however, in practice the Government imposes limits on freedom of religion...In 1984, the Government added Section 298(c), commonly referred to as the ‘anti-Ahmadi laws,’ to the penal code. The section prohibits Ahmadi from calling themselves Muslims or posing as Muslims, from referring to their faith as Islam, from preaching or propagating their faith, from inviting others to accept the Ahmadi faith, and from insulting the religious feelings of Muslims...The constitutionality of Section 298(c) was upheld in a split-decision supreme court case in 1996. The punishment for violation of the section is imprisonment for up to three years and a fine.” So an Ahmadi overheard reciting a Muslim prayer can be arrested for posing as a Muslim, arrested for praying to his god, and no one can step in to help without risking their own arrest. The Ahmadi persecution is rampant in other countries as well, particularly in Southeast Asia.

With numerous web sites and publications, Ahmadi groups have sought to educate others about the history of their religious views, as well as about the controversy surrounding their beliefs (see www.alislam.org). Masood Nasir, a member of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, says the Ahmadi motto is “Love for all, hatred for none,” and that “we never retaliate, so awareness about persecution is needed...Our humanitarian relief organization, Humanity First (www.humanityfirst.org), is 100% volunteer based.” Ahmadi do not believe Islam endorses blood for apostasy.

When a government establishes fealty to a particular set of religious doctrine, sectarianism grows as you’re either with the majority group or against it. In her book, The Origins of Totalitarianism, political theorist Hannah Arendt (1906-75) was quoted as saying, “Under conditions of tyranny, it is far easier to act than to think.” In a country which fails to provide equal rights and privileges to all its citizens, fear and distrust replace security, and, as Robert A. Seiple, former U.S. Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom said, “A society is only as secure as its most vulnerable minority.”