

Dear

I am writing to draw your attention to the serious danger and injustice facing many thousands of Muslims who choose to convert to another faith in different countries around the world.

Traditional Islamic law states that sane adult male apostates from Islam should be put to death, their marriages annulled and their children and property taken away from them. Three of the schools of Islamic law hold that the death penalty should apply also to female apostates from Islam. This tradition, far from being time bound, is still upheld and taught by most Muslim religious leaders around the world today. In countries like Saudi Arabia, Iran, Sudan, Qatar, Mauritania and now apparently Afghanistan, as the case of Abdul Rahman has exposed, the death penalty for apostasy is enshrined in the law. Converts also face imprisonment, death threats, torture and beatings because of their faith; some die in prison, others disappear.

Even in those countries where no law specifically prohibiting apostasy exists, many converts are murdered by members of their own family or community or are subjected to terrifying threats, violence and persecution. Even in Western nations where Muslims are a minority, converts may still face widespread hostility and aggression from their own families and communities. These are not random acts of cruelty but the application of Islamic law.

This injustice is compounded by the fact that Islam, like Christianity, is a missionary religion in which the adherents must seek to share their faith and make converts. The paradox is that whilst Muslims are taking Islam across the globe and gaining many converts, they are simultaneously teaching that any Muslim who rejects Islam should be put to death.

Such barbaric treatment stands in sharp contrast with international human rights standards such as Article 18 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Implementation of the Islamic law of apostasy, whether official or unofficial, is totally unacceptable in the twenty first century. Everyone should have freedom to change their faith.

Please would you therefore urgently to use whatever influence you have with the Muslim community in this country to call for a clear signal from Islamic religious leaders that the shari'a law must be reformed so that the death penalty for apostates no longer applies and that Muslims who choose to convert to another faith - in any country - are free to do so without fear of punishment or death.

May I stress that this letter is not intended as a general attack on Islam, or an attempt to single out Muslims or stir up resentment towards them. Rather it is an attempt to draw attention to a particular problem within traditional Islamic teaching which is causing untold danger and suffering for thousands of converts around the world.

I would be most grateful if you would reply to this letter and let me know what action you are able to take.

Yours sincerely