

## Archbishop joins calls for protection of Pakistan's Christians

"Freedom of worship is a universal human right," says Archbishop during visit to church leaders in Pakistan



*Archbishop Justin at a special Thanksgiving service at the Cathedral of the Resurrection, Lahore, 28 May 2014. (Reuters)*

[Read a special report about Archbishop Justin's visit to Pakistan on the Times website \(£\)](#)

The Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby has said the Christians of Pakistan are a people under siege and joined calls for their churches to be protected and for them to be able to worship in safety.

“Freedom of worship is a universal human right around the world, and all countries need to pay attention to that,” he said.

Meanwhile, condemning the "revolting lynching" of a pregnant Pakistani woman who was stoned to death by her family in front of hundreds of people outside the Lahore high court, the Archbishop [told the Times](#): “I was utterly horrified and every Pakistani I have spoken to is also horrified. It (the stoning) was in no sense a punishment, but but a revolting lynching.”

Archbishop Justin was [speaking at the end of a two-day visit](#) to Pakistan's church leaders in the eastern city of Lahore, during which he heard of the persecution and daily threats Christians face from Islamist militants.

Pakistan is home to 3.6 million Christians – about two percent of the population – who have been targeted by the misuse of draconian blasphemy laws.

Blasphemy carries the death penalty in Pakistan and cases against both religious minorities and Muslims are rising.

The Archbishop added his voice to the plea for an immediate change in laws that have also been misused to target Muslims by those with a vendetta against their neighbours.

“I pray for their blessing and for the government to be favourable to seeing that this is not a group that are seeking undue advantage but are only seeking to do good,” [he said during a press conference](#).

Archbishop Justin, accompanied by his wife Caroline, was visiting Pakistan at the invitation of its Anglican primate, the Most Revd Samuel Robert Azariah, Bishop of Raiwind and Moderator of the Church of Pakistan.

During the visit Archbishop Justin met with Christian and Muslim leaders, attended a special service at Lahore’s Cathedral of the Resurrection, and met with high school students.

The visit is the first leg of a week-long visit by Archbishop Justin to fellow Anglican primates in the region. Today the Archbishop arrived in Bangladesh, after which he will travel to India.

Archbishop Justin’s visit to the region forms part of his plan to visit all of his fellow archbishops (also known as 'primates') during his first 18 months in office. His desire is to express solidarity, build personal and professional bonds, understand the primates’ work in their local contexts, and lay foundations for good collaboration over the coming years.