

Statement on the abduction of Shahbaz Taseer in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan

The Commonwealth Lawyers Association (CLA) and the **Bar Human Rights Committee (BHRC)** refer to their previous statement in relation to Pakistan of 21 April 2011. In that statement, it was observed that there is an atmosphere of fear and intimidation surrounding the blasphemy laws in Pakistan.

Since April 2011, the situation in Pakistan with respect to the blasphemy laws has continued to be grave. Individuals have been convicted of blasphemy and sentenced to death or to indefinite jail terms on the basis of insufficient evidence. Moreover, individuals who are associated with calls for reform of the blasphemy laws have continued to receive credible death threats.

Several individuals accused of blasphemy have been killed due to vigilante violence, and on 26 August 2011, Shahbaz Taseer was abducted at gunpoint in broad daylight when he was on his way to work. It is feared that Shahbaz is being held by groups opposing the reform of the blasphemy laws as the rest of the Taseer family had been receiving threats by such groups since the assassination of Shahbaz' father, Punjab Governor Salmaan Taseer, in January 2011. Salmaan Taseer's killer, Mumtaz Qadri, has publicly acknowledged that his motivation for the killing was due to Salmaan's attempts to reform the blasphemy laws.

The CLA and BHRC continue to urge the Government of Pakistan

- to carefully scrutinise the operation of the blasphemy laws; and
- to undertake a detailed assessment of the need for their abolition or reform; and
- to take urgent steps to protect those at risk of vigilante violence due to blasphemy issues; and
- to fully investigate and fairly prosecute all persons involved in the recent spate of killings.

In light of the recent kidnapping of Shahbaz Taseer, the CLA and the BHRC now also urge the Government of Pakistan and, in particular, its law enforcement authorities, to make every effort in order to ensure his safe return.

**Commonwealth Lawyers Association
Bar Human Rights Committee
12 September 2011**

NOTE TO EDITORS:

The **Commonwealth Lawyer's Association** is an international organisation which exists to promote and maintain the rule of law throughout the Commonwealth by ensuring that an independent and efficient legal profession, with the highest standards of ethics and integrity, serves the people of the Commonwealth. www.commonwealthlawyers.com

The **Bar Human Rights Committee** is the international human rights arm of the Bar of England and Wales. It is an independent body concerned with defending the rule of law and internationally recognised legal standards relating to human rights and the right to a fair trial. For more information please contact BHRC in London, UK, on email: bhrc@compuserve.com.