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PAKISTAN Assassination of Salmaan Taseer highlights danger faced by opponents of blasphemy laws

CSW has condemned today's assassination of the Governor of Pakistan's Punjab Province, Salmaan Taseer, describing his death as a "tragic reminder of the extreme danger" faced by those opposing the country's controversial blasphemy laws.

Mr. Taseer is believed to have been killed by a member of his own elite security team. He was shot multiple times in Kohsar Market, Islamabad.

The man accused of the shooting has been arrested by local police, along with five others. The accused has stated that his motivation was Mr. Taseer's support for amendments to Pakistan's blasphemy laws.

Salmaan Taseer was a Muslim and was known for his progressive views. He was appointed Governor of Punjab by President Zardari in March 2008.

Following the conviction of a Christian lady, Asia Bibi, in November 2010, he became outspoken in his criticism of the blasphemy laws and their misuse. He was also proactive in demanding justice for Asia Bibi and her family.

Pakistani human rights activist, Group Captain (rtd) Cecil Chaudhry, who knew the Governor, said, "This shooting is tragic and should never have happened." He went on to describe the incident as "absolutely shameful".

CSW's Chief Executive, Mervyn Thomas, said "CSW condemns the murder of Salmaan Taseer and we offer our sincere condolences to his family and community. His death is a tragic reminder of the extreme danger faced by all those who stand for justice in opposition to the blasphemy laws in Pakistan, whether politicians, journalists, lawyers or activists. How many more lives must be destroyed before this legislation is repealed?"

Notes to Editor:

1. Asia Bibi was sentenced to death on November 7, 2010 for blasphemy against the Prophet Mohammed. Her family maintains that the accusations were false. For further background please see this recent CSW [press release](#).