

NSS raises case of girl subjected to forced marriage in Pakistan

Posted: Fri, 18th Dec 2020

The National Secular Society has backed a campaign to secure the freedom and safety of a 14-year-old girl in fear of her life in Pakistan after fleeing a forced marriage.

Maira Shahbaz and her family are in hiding after defying a Lahore High Court ruling that she should return to Mohamad Nakash Tariq, 30 years her senior, who claims to be her husband.

She has said Mr Nakash has threatened to kill both her and her family.

Her ordeal

The 14-year-old was abducted at gunpoint in April 2020, gang-raped, forcibly converted to Islam and forced to marry her abductor.

She later escaped Nakash's custody and fled into hiding with her parents. She told police that Nakash filmed her being raped and threatened to release the video online if she resisted.

In July a court ordered that she should be placed in a women's shelter. But Lahore's High Court overturned this in August, forcing her to return to Nakash on the grounds that she had embraced Islam and the marriage was valid.

This was despite her family producing a birth certificate showing the girl to be 13 at the time of the alleged ceremony.

Campaign and NSS backing

Catholic charity Aid to the Church in Need (ACN) is leading a campaign calling on prime minister Boris Johnson to grant her asylum.

In a letter to the prime minister, the NSS has urged the UK government to do everything in its power to secure the freedom and safety of Ms Shabbaz and her family.

NSS chief executive, Stephen Evans, said: "This is a particularly harrowing example of the all too common phenomenon of forced marriage and forced conversion of women and girls from religious minorities in Pakistan.

"Unless Maira can escape Pakistan, she will be condemned as an apostate by her abductor and his supporters – and will be at risk of being killed.

"We understand Maira Shahbaz and her family are seeking asylum in the UK. We hope the UK government will do everything possible to facilitate that, or to assist in guaranteeing her safety elsewhere."

On 14 December, the UK minister for South Asia, Commonwealth and United Nations, Tariq Ahmad, said the government was "closely monitoring developments" in the case.

Notes

- Those wishing to back calls for the prime minister to grant UK asylum to Maira Shahbaz and her family can sign a petition [on the ACN website](#).
- According to a [report](#) by the Movement for Solidarity and Peace in Pakistan, an estimated one thousand girls from Christian and Hindu backgrounds are forced to convert and marry Muslim men in Pakistan every year.
- UNICEF estimates that 21% of girls in Pakistan are married by the age of 18, and three per cent before they turn 15.

With archive image of Maira Shahbaz, © Aid to the Church in Need.

What the NSS stands for

The Secular Charter outlines 10 principles that guide us as we campaign for a secular democracy which safeguards all citizens' rights to freedom of and from religion.

- [Read the Secular Charter](#)
- [Share on What's App](#)
- [Share on Facebook](#)
- [Share on Twitter](#)
- [Share on Email](#)
- [Subscribe to RSS Feed](#)

Tags: [Marriage](#)

Related Campaigns

-

[Reform wedding laws](#)

Make marriage fairer for all people of all religions and beliefs.

[Read More](#)

Related Articles

[Don't let the Church dictate how we marry](#)

In justifying its uniquely privileged position as the [established religion](#), the Church of England likes to portray... [Read More »](#)

Homophobic churches and liberal states make for unhappy bedfellows

Parliament should begin the process of disestablishment rather than try to fix the Church of England, argues Stephen... [Read More »](#)

NSS welcomes recommended reform to weddings

The National Secular Society has welcomed a government-commissioned report recommending reform of wedding laws in... [Read More »](#)

N. Ireland to adopt marriage law reforms backed by NSS

Northern Ireland will adopt proposals backed by the National Secular Society to modernise marriage laws.

In a [statement... Read More »](#)

NSS welcomes legalisation of outdoor weddings in England & Wales

The National Secular Society has welcomed moves to permanently allow outdoor weddings in England and Wales.

The government... [Read More »](#)