

DEATH FOR CATHOLIC CONVERT AVERTED

Abdul Rahman, an Afghan man who converted to Roman Catholicism 16 years ago, went on trial in Afghanistan in March because he abandoned Islam. Under the Afghan constitution, which is based on Shariah law, any Muslim who rejects Islam must be sentenced to death. Fortunately for Rahman, the security court dismissed the charges against him (they suspected he was insane), and he was able to flee to Italy.

When we learned of the pending trial, we jumped on this issue immediately by issuing the following comments to the press:

“Hosnia Wafayosofi, an official at the jail where Abdul Rahman is imprisoned, boasts that ‘We will cut him into little pieces.’ Rahman, whose own father wants him killed, has no lawyer, no rights of any kind. The prosecutor, Abdul Wasi, calls Rahman a ‘microbe in society’ who ‘should be killed.’ The judge who is trying the case says, ‘If he doesn’t regret his conversion, the punishment will be enforced on him. And the punishment is death.’ And what has been the response of American elites?

“Unlike the Italian and German governments, which have waged a vocal protest against this act of barbarism, the administration of President George W. Bush has been quite mute. Yet in his second inaugural address, President Bush said, ‘We will encourage reform in other governments by making clear that success in our relations will require the decent treatment of their own people.’ Was Bush just blowing smoke? Bush also said, ‘All who live in tyranny and hopelessness can know the United States will not ignore your oppression or excuse your oppressors.’ Then why not begin with Abdul Rahman?”

We also noted that as of March 22, the *New York Times* had run one story on Rahman, consisting of three sentences. The *Washington Post* had run two stories, for a total of nine sentences. And the Council on American-Islamic Relations said nothing until later that day: only after it consulted with 13 Islamic scholars did it object to killing Rahman.

"American troops did not die in Afghanistan so that the new government could kill Christian converts," we said."

Even after Rahman was freed, we kept the pressure on. Here is our news release of March 30:

"The idea that 500 Catholic priests, or Protestant ministers, or Jewish rabbis would assemble at a church or synagogue demanding the murder of a person who abandoned Catholicism, Protestantism or Judaism for Islam is unthinkable. But just yesterday, 500 Muslim clerics assembled at a mosque in Afghanistan calling for the death of Christian convert Abdul Rahman. Moreover, the idea that the U.S. Congress would condemn the release of an Islamic convert is equally unfathomable, yet the Afghan parliament wasted no time blasting Rahman's release to Italy yesterday. As such, this issue is far from over.

"The Catholic League fully supports House Resolution 736 expressing the will of Congress that religious liberty be respected in Afghanistan. The legislation, which was co-sponsored by Rep. Michael Fitzpatrick, denounces the unconscionable assault on Abdul Rahman's religious liberties, and thereby commits American lawmakers to take a more active role in monitoring basic human rights in Afghanistan. To be plain, American troops did not lose their lives in Afghanistan so that Christian converts could be killed by the new government.

"The U.S. has yet to grant asylum status to Rahman, and has instead pretended that this is a parochial concern. State

Department spokesman Sean McCormack said the other day that the issue of Rahman seeking asylum in the U.S. was 'being handled as a private matter.' It's too late to call this a private matter—it involves American lives and money—and attempts to do so will be greeted by the American people with derision.

"We are delighted to note the courageous and timely response from Pope Benedict XVI on the matter of Abdul Rahman. The pope is a role model for the leaders of all nations."