

## Why should they be secret?

### Barnabas Fund launches campaign for the abolition of the Islamic apostasy law

Islam is a one-way street. You can convert to Islam but you are not allowed to convert from Islam. All schools of Islamic law, shari'a, agree on this rule and specify the death sentence for an adult male Muslim who chooses to leave his Islamic faith. Most also impose the death penalty on women apostates. The rule was established many centuries ago by Islamic scholars, but even today most Islamic religious leaders and many ordinary Muslim people agree with it.

The death penalty is rarely put into practice, but the existence of this "apostasy law" is so well known amongst Muslims that it generates strong hostility towards apostates, whether from family or community, from religious or secular leaders, from police or judiciary. So it is normal for converts from Islam to face persecution and violence. They may be arrested, either for apostasy or on a pretext. They may be attacked, beaten or even murdered by their own relatives. And those who commit the violence will probably not be punished for it.

A further range of penalties for apostasy is laid down in shari'a, including losing one's spouse and children and forfeiting one's property and inheritance. These are imposed in many Muslim contexts today.

It is not surprising that many converts from Islam to Christianity keep their new faith secret, but why should they have to do so? Islam actively encourages non-Muslims to convert to Islam, but it is the only world faith with a death sentence for those who leave it.

The Islamic apostasy law also stands in stark contrast to Article 18 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, published sixty years ago this month, which states that "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief..."

### Things can change

There are brave Muslim voices calling for the apostasy law to be abolished. Some scholars point out that the Qu'ran has no clear statement about the need to punish apostasy in this life. Others doubt that the traditions about Muhammad's response to apostates are genuine. Still others say that apostates who were killed in the early days of Islam were condemned not for changing their faith, but for rebelling against the Islamic state.

In support of these voices, Barnabas Fund is launching a new campaign that seeks to bring an end to the Islamic apostasy law. Dr Patrick Sookhdeo, International Director, says, "Although only Muslim leaders can make this happen, we as Christians can help the process, by speaking up for freedom of religion and belief and by encouraging others to do the same. We ask you to join us in our efforts and prayers to bring about change for those who choose to leave their Islamic faith, so that they are no longer subject to any penalty but are free to follow their new convictions without fear."

### What to do now

If you would like to sign our petition, please go to [sign online petition](#). **This Petition is Now Closed! - 01/04/2010**

The sign-up sheet can also be downloaded and printed out [here](#) (for Australia [click here](#) | for USA [click here](#) | for Germany [click here](#) | for France [click here](#)), so that you can both encourage your friends to sign and take the petition to your church.

Above all, please pray: that the apostasy law will lose its hold on Muslim people worldwide; that it will be rejected as a wrong interpretation of the Islamic sources; and that Muslims may be free to convert without any danger of reprisals.