



## **Pakistani Christian handed death sentence for 'blasphemy'**

A Christian man has been sentenced to death in Pakistan for allegedly insulting the Prophet Muhammad.

Nadeem James, 35, was convicted under the country's controversial blasphemy laws on Friday with his lawyer, Riaz Anjum, saying he was framed.

James went on the run last July before being arrested after he was accused of sending a poem to his friend on WhatsApp that was derogatory about the Islamic prophet.

But defence lawyer Anjum told AFP news agency he was being falsely accused because his friend was angered about an affair James, a Christian, was allegedly having with a Muslim woman.

'Mr James was handed a death sentence by the court on Thursday on blasphemy charges,' he said.

'My client will appeal the sentence in the high court as he has been framed by his friend, who was annoyed over Mr James' affair with a Muslim girl.'

Under Pakistan's blasphemy laws anyone accused of insulting Islam can be sentenced to death. Although no death sentences have been carried out, a number of those accused of blasphemy have been killed by mobs.

Human rights groups and Christian persecution charities say the law is used to settle personal scores and extrajudicial killings against religious minorities.

There have been at least 67 murders over unproven allegations of blasphemy since 1990, according to figures from a research centre and independent records kept by Reuters.

Earlier this month a Christian teenager was beaten to death by his Muslim classmates.

Sharoon Masih, 17, was battered by fellow pupils in a classroom in the Vehari District in Punjab, Pakistan, just days into his first term as the lone Christian student at a new school,

The 2017 World Watch List of the 50 countries in which it is most difficult to be a Christian by the Christian charity Open Doors [places Pakistan at number four](#).