

Edinburgh pensioner sentenced to death in Pakistan



An Edinburgh pensioner has been sentenced to death in Pakistan for blasphemy.

Mohammed Asghar (68) was arrested in September 2010 after writing letters to a lawyer and politician claiming to be a prophet, according to Reuters.

He appeared at a court in Rawalpini on Thursday where he was sentenced to death.

Mr Asghar has a history of mental illness and was diagnosed with paranoid schizophrenia in 2010 at the Royal Victoria Hospital in Edinburgh where he was kept under observation for four weeks. Following his discharge, he moved to Pakistan.

His legal team produced an affidavit from Dr Jane McLennan at the Royal Victoria confirming his mental and physical ill health, along with his NHS records.

In the affidavit, Dr McLennan said: "I understand that Mr Asghar has been arrested for an offence of or related to blasphemy in Pakistan. I have read the document relating to the allegations against him.

"Unfortunately for him it is entirely consistent with a relapse of his schizophrenia that he would make utterances and act in a manner which would attract criminal charged in Pakistan. It is my professional opinion that such statements and behaviour would be very consistent with his mental illness and his symptoms of grandiosity and behavioural disinhibition would be very consistent with the alleged criminal behaviour.

"During his time in hospital, he often referred to himself as

being a very holy man in ways that were grandiose and clearly a reflection of his mental illness. If his condition worsened, as it seems to have done, he may have described himself in more exaggerated terms while not meaning to commit blasphemy.”

Maya Foa, director of Reprieve’s death penalty team, said: “One only needs to check Mohammed Asghar’s extensive UK medical records to see that he is a seriously mentally ill man, in dire need of medical care.

“The evidence is clear that he is unable to defend himself in court. Worse still, he is currently being held in utterly unsuitable conditions in prison, and we are very concerned about his health. The British government must immediately take all necessary steps to secure Mr Asghar’s safety.”

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office confirmed they are aware of Mr Asghar’s sentence and will continue to make representations to the Pakistan government.

A spokesman said: “We are aware that a British national, Mohammed Asghar, is facing the death penalty in Pakistan. We strongly object to the use of the death penalty and will continue to provide consular assistance to him and his family during this difficult time

“We have continuously made representations to the Pakistan government on behalf of Mr Asghar and we will continue to do so. We are opposed to the death penalty in all circumstances and we are dedicated to doing all we can to prevent the execution of any British national.”