

Why should they be secret?

Saudi Arabian Christian Fatima had her tongue cut out and was burnt to death by a member of her family. Her crime? Her family discovered that she had left Islam and converted to Christianity.

“Hannah” from Britain has moved house 45 times since she was 16 years old. The reason? Her Muslim family have vowed to kill her because she converted to Christianity.

Mohammad Abbad, a 40-year-old Christian from Jordan, was about to lose his wife and his two children. Why? Mohammad’s father reported his son, a convert from Islam to Christianity, as an apostate to the police, seeking to annul his son’s marriage and gain custody of his grandchildren. Mohammad and his family have now fled the country.

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. Other, less well-known penalties for apostasy demand that a convert’s marriage should be annulled and that any children must remain in a Muslim context, which effectively means that the convert loses any right to custody or even to see his or her children. Leaving Islam can also result in losing one’s property and inheritance.

Only a handful of countries today have the death penalty for leaving Islam written into their legal system, and even in these countries it is rarely put into practice. Nevertheless, the existence of the “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. Apostates may be attacked, beaten or even murdered by their own relatives. And those who commit the violence will probably not be punished for it.

Things can change

It does not have to be like this.

On 22 August 2007 Christian and Muslim groups in Norway signed a joint declaration affirming the right to convert from one faith to another without fear of harassment or violence. This was the first time that a church and a representative national Muslim organisation jointly acknowledged the right to convert.

Barnabas Fund’s campaign for 2009 seeks to build on this precedent and eventually to bring an end to the Islamic apostasy law. Although only Muslim leaders can make this happen, we as Christians can help the process. Sign the petition overleaf, and get your church and friends to sign it too. It will be presented to Western governments in 2010.

Please contact your national Barnabas Fund office for more copies of this petition leaflet or feel free to make your own photocopies.

