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## Abdul Rahman Update — His Life on the Line

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Abdul Rahman, the Afghan man on trial for converting to Christianity, still faces the prospect of being executed for his faith if convicted by the Afghan court. [See extensive coverage below.]

Here is the latest as reported by *The New York Times*:

*The judge presiding over the prosecution of an Afghan man facing death for converting from Islam to Christianity said Thursday that he would resist any interference, despite mounting international condemnation. . . .*

*The case illustrates a central contradiction of the compromise Constitution that Afghanistan adopted in 2004, which has been cited as an example for other Islamic countries. One passage declares Islam Afghanistan's supreme law, while another states that the country grants its citizens religious freedom.*

*In an intentional effort to avoid a standoff, the Constitution leaves certain crimes to be handled by religious judges, according to J. Alexander Thier of the Hoover Institution, who was an adviser on the Constitution. One such crime is converting from Islam to another religion.*

*Under conservative interpretations, a convert can be sentenced to death. Many moderate Muslims reject that interpretation as too severe. Afghanistan's laws are silent on the matter, and the country's criminal code does not specifically declare converting from Islam to Christianity a crime. . . .*

*If he is convicted, Mr. Rahman will be able to appeal his sentence to two higher courts. Maulavi Zada, the judge overseeing the case, said Thursday that the next court session would be held in several days. It was unclear whether Mr. Rahman would present any defense. To date, no lawyer in Kabul has been willing to represent him.*

*Moderate Afghan officials are eager to quietly dispose of the case, but the vocal criticism from American and Western officials makes that more difficult, according to Mr. Rubin. One possible compromise would involve the court's declaring Mr. Rahman mentally ill and allowing him to leave the country.*

Germany's *Der Spiegel* offers this analysis:

*The response to Western criticism of the Kabul verdict is being dismissed as a case of foreigners "meddling" in Afghanistan's "domestic affairs." This means it's high time to send a clearer message. It's not just about Abdul Rahman, who has chosen to become a Christian for reasons that are no one's business but his own. It's also about the women locked away in Afghan prisons for having been accused of adultery. It's about female students who can't walk down the street by themselves because a few male illiterates might get it into their heads to attack them. And it's about the many hundreds of thousands of Afghan women forced to live their lives behind walls — without access to education, without the right to happiness. There is a good chance that President Hamid Karzai will pardon Abdul Rahman, as he has many of the imprisoned women, who are often convicted on bogus adultery charges made up by men who simply want to get rid of them. But this is not about mercy; it's about basic human rights. The West should insist on nothing less.*

*This is in no way merely a domestic matter — it is a question of the validity of international human rights. When a Danish newspaper published a few more or less idiotic cartoons, Islamic rage flared up. Now that human lives and basic*

*rights are at issue, we're hearing statements that could just as easily have been made during the Cold War. Back then, the phrase "domestic affairs" was invoked by the Soviet empire every time the West criticized its human rights record. What concerns Abdul Rahman and the women of Afghanistan concerns us too. And if the German army can't defend this kind of liberty in the Hindukush, then it should leave. Our soldiers have sworn allegiance to the rights enshrined in the German constitution; there's no reason to turn these soldiers into toothless operetta characters.*

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