

**Jews of Pakistan - speech by Lyn Julius, Harif (UK Association of Jews from the Middle East and North Africa) [www.harif.org](http://www.harif.org)**

2,500 - 3,000 Jews, Bnai Israel and Baghdadi Jews. Artisans and civil servants. Many landmarks in Karachi were designed by Moses Somake and Leopold Weiss (Muhammad Assad) helped draft the constitution. Hostility began in 1947 when Mohajir Muslim refugees from India ransacked Jewish sites and places of worship. They burnt the Karachi synagogue. Every time there was a war in the Middle East, the Jews suffered the repercussions. In 1948 most Jews left for Israel and the population continued to decline so that after 1967 there were only 350 Jews left.

In 1988 the Magen Shalom synagogue in Karachi was demolished under Zia al-Huq and a shopping centre built on the site. The last practising survivor of the Jewish community, Rachel Joseph, fought for a smaller synagogue to be rebuilt, without success. She died in 2006 aged 88 in penury in a tiny room.

There are no more self-identifying Jews in Pakistan although some ten families of Jewish origin who masquerade as Parsis or Muslims are still thought to exist.

Fishel Benkhald is Pakistan's only self-declared Jew. He wants to restore the cemetery and rebuild the synagogue in Karachi. "My dream is to gain empathy. Later I will try and get help and start the process for a small synagogue."

In 2009 he remembers feeling sick of hearing the constant anti-Semitic propaganda and conspiracy theories from the Pakistani government and media. "My political side outgrew my fear. I felt less hesitant to claim my religion more publically than I would have before," he writes.

In February 2014 Fishel, whose father is Muslim but whose mother is Jewish (and therefore considered Jewish under Jewish law) planned to change his official religious status from Islam to Judaism. He said "It is dangerous, but I will go at least once to record my request so their response can be documented."

Fishel tells us NADRA, the database in Pakistan which handles citizenship, denied his request to change his identity from 'Muslim' to 'Jew'.

The end of the Jewish community in Pakistan has not meant the end of antisemitism. Pakistan has joined the ranks of states without Jews who blame the Jews for everything that goes wrong.

They imagine that the Jews are engaged in a global conspiracy to control the world. Having got rid of their Jews, they think they have expelled the virus but it is they who are suffering from a pathology. Targeting minorities is a sign of a sick society.

What is the cure? The cure is a healthy society, guaranteeing human and civil rights and the protection of minorities.

The ethnic cleansing of minorities sets a dangerous precedent for society at large.

A society that devours its Jews, or its Christians, or its Shia Muslims, ends up devouring itself.