



9.23.13

PAKISTAN | CSW Strongly Condemns Attack on Peshawar Church

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) strongly condemns Sunday's double suicide bombing at All Saints Church, Peshawar, expressing condolences for all affected.

At least 81 people were reportedly killed and well over 100 injured in the attack, which took place as people were leaving the building after a Sunday morning service. Local sources indicate that the death toll is higher than reported. The church has a capacity of 500-600, and others usually gather for food distribution after this service.

The double bombing has been claimed by militant groups said to be linked to the Pakistani Taliban. They claim to be acting in response to the ongoing, US-led drone attacks in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas, and have pledged to continue targeting 'non-Muslims' until the campaign ceases.

Nationwide protests are taking place, with both the Christian community and civil society more widely condemning the attacks and criticizing the provincial government, led by Imran Khan's party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI). Criticism has centered on the failure to provide adequate protection for religious minorities or to tackle religious intolerance effectively. The PTI government has announced 500,000 rupees of compensation to the family of each victim.

Three days of mourning was declared by both the federal and provincial government and church institutions will remain closed for that period as well. Muslim and Christian organizations alike are providing aid to the victims.

The northern city of Peshawar already experiences a much higher rate of suicide bombings than other Pakistani cities. The Christian community in the area has not been targeted in this way since 2002, after the US-led invasion of Afghanistan.

In Pakistan, suicide bombers have increasingly targeted communities on the basis of their religion in

recent years. Over 80 people were killed in May 2010 when two Ahmadi mosques were attacked simultaneously in Lahore, while over 100 died as a result of four bombings targeting the Shia community last January.

Joseph Coutts, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Karachi, condemned the attack, labeling it a “shameful act of cowardice” and calling on the government to “seriously tackle the increasing religious and sectarian intolerance that has reached alarming proportions, as this incident proves.” Michelle Chaudhry, President of the Cecil & Iris Chaudhry Foundation, described the incident as “the worst we [Christians] have seen so far,” and warned against shifting responsibility from the provincial to the federal level government.

Mervyn Thomas, CSW’s Chief Executive, said, “We strongly condemn this senseless attack and offer our sincere condolences for all affected. There can be no justification for killing of this kind. We support the country-wide calls for those responsible to be held accountable and for both the provincial PTI government and the federal government to implement measures for increased security around minority places of worship. We urge the PTI government to promote dialogue to counteract the deeply misguided view that Christians are agents of the West and somehow therefore constitute legitimate targets. We further urge the federal government to challenge and punish those who spread messages of division and violence along religious or sectarian lines.”