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PAKISTAN | Ahmadi Mosque Attacked

An Ahmadi mosque in Chakwal district, 90 miles south of Islamabad, was attacked by a mob of approximately 1,000 people who attempted to seize the property Dec. 12.

The Ahmadiyya Muslim community refused to hand over control of its Baitul Zikr mosque in Dulmial, Chakwal district after recent demands from local clerics to do so. In a letter to the Chakwal district administration Dec. 5, the Ahmadiyya community requested additional security after religious leaders at a nearby Sunni mosque called on those gathered to incite violence against the Ahmadis during a procession to mark the birthday of Prophet Muhammad on Dec. 12. However, no protection was offered.

During the procession Dec. 12, violence broke out when people began chanting anti-Ahmadiyya slogans and a group of men who were part of the rally started to throw stones and bricks at the mosque with gunmen opening fire on Ahmadis in the vicinity. An estimated 40 worshippers inside the mosque locked themselves in the building, refusing entry to anyone until the arrival of police. One Ahmadi suffered cardiac arrest while trapped inside the mosque.

The police managed to disperse the protestors with support from the Pakistani army, but only after the protestors had forced their way into the mosque and set its contents alight. The mosque has now been sealed by authorities.

The Ahmadiyya community in Pakistan faces persecution and discrimination by both state and non-state actors since the 1974 constitutional amendment which declared them as non-Muslims. After the introduction of Ordinance XX (20) in 1984, they were further criminalized with up to three years imprisonment and a fine for their practice of Islam or identifying themselves as Muslim.

Some clerics in Pakistan have criticized Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's recent decision to rename the National Centre for Physics at the Quaid-i-Azam University after Professor Abdus Salam, an Ahmadi and Pakistan's first Nobel laureate. The attack on the mosque follows a raid on the Ahmadiyya headquarters in Rabwah on Dec. 5.

Mervyn Thomas, Chief Executive of Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW), said, "While we welcome the police and army intervention to help the innocent Ahmadis who were subject to this deplorable attack, the anti-Ahmadiyya laws within the constitution legitimize the violence perpetrated against this minority community and create an environment in which hate speech and sectarian violence are rife. We urge authorities to take steps to prosecute those responsible for this attack and to increase steps to provide adequate protection for the Ahmadiyya community. Until the government of Pakistan fully repeals the anti-Ahmadiyya legislation the community will continue to suffer state sponsored persecution."