

# **The government of Pakistan must carry out a high powered inquiry into the killings of Christians**

The state of Pakistan has gone to the dogs where killings by law enforcement persons and terrorists are no longer considered a crime but rather acts of courage

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A Statement from the Asian Human Rights Commission

PAKISTAN: The state apparatus has gone to the dogs

The AHRC urges the government of Pakistan to carry out a high powered inquiry into the killings of Christians by a commission of experts rather than the police

The Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) strongly condemns the two deadly suicide attacks on the All Saints Church in Peshawar, the capital city of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province that killed 96 innocent Christians and injured a further 145 persons who were attending the Sunday service. Among those killed were around 41 women and eight children and many of the wounded are seriously injured.

The AHRC expresses its solidarity with the Christian community and especially with the families of the deceased and urges the government of Pakistan to carry out a high powered inquiry by a commission of experts rather than the usual collection of police officers. It is, in fact, the police who must take a large degree of the blame for this attack as they ignored the persistent requests by the Christian community for protection.

The Christian leaders have claimed that the police did not provide sufficient security despite repeated requests. While the church had its own security personnel they were powerless against the suicide bombers who managed to enter the church and detonate the explosives strapped to their bodies. The congregation attending the Catholic Church located near the All Saints Church rushed to help the injured and dying. A public outcry over the government's ongoing failure to protect religious minorities has arisen and this time it has made international headlines, once again giving the Islamic society of the country a bad name.

According to the foreign news agencies, a wing of the Pakistani Taliban, Jindullah Hafsa, has accepted responsibility for the suicide attacks. A spokesperson claimed that the organisation will continue to attack foreigners and Christians until the USA halts its drone attacks on Pakistani soil. He went on to say that Christians are the enemies of Islam and therefore they will continue to kill them.

According to the details, around 500 people attended the Sunday service. At approximately 11:40 am

as the priest ended the service and the parishioners were about to leave the two suicide bombers entered the Church and detonated their bombs. There were two explosions which left dead and dying people littering the floor of the Church. The force of the explosions left gaping holes in the walls. Chaos ensued and the injured cried out in pain and panic as the survivors picked up the injured and started rushing them to the hospital. Appallingly, the emergency services provided by the local authorities left a great deal to be desired and the delays in reaching the scene of the devastation resulted in more casualties.

Today Pakistan stands as one of the most glaring examples of religious intolerance in the world. The non-Muslims in the country are extremely downtrodden and marginalized and their communities have to face atrocities and brutality at every level; their faith being their only crime. They face an ever increasing religious intolerance against them which successive governments have done nothing to halt.

This is not a new incident against the religious minority communities, particularly against the Christians. Every year many churches are attacked in different parts of the country; Christians are persecuted on charges of blasphemy and Christian girls are abducted and forced to convert to Islam. The places of worship and other properties of the religious minorities have been under severe attack for the last many decades however, it is very sad that nothing concrete has been done to safeguard their lives and properties. The latest attack in Peshawar has once again raised the sense of insecurity among the religious minority groups.

The suicide attacks on places of worship, which even includes the mosques, are part of the implementation of an Islamic system and the state remains a silent spectator so as to give the terrorists time to implement their agenda to convert Pakistan to a pure theocratic country. The important institutions such as the Pakistan Army, the judiciary and successive governments, particularly those of the military dictators have both covertly and overtly remained behind the idea of eliminating the religious minority groups.

Pakistan is such a type of state where a sitting governor was assassinated for coming out in support of an innocent Christian lady to defend her. His assassin was treated as a hero of Islam and a retired chief justice of the High Court defended him in the court of law. The former federal minister of religious minorities, Mr. Shahbaz Bhatti, was murdered but yet the killers were not arrested even after three years.

The state of Pakistan has gone to the dogs where killings by law enforcement persons and terrorists are no longer considered a crime but rather acts of courage. The state sees these killings as a means to divide society into different sects and groups with the idea that they will be easier to control. The threats by the terrorist groups every day to implement their Islamic agenda by killing innocent citizens continue as they have found friends and supporters in the different institutions of the state including the judiciary. The judiciary claims that prosecution of captured terrorists is not possible due to lack of evidence in spite of presence of confessional statements by the terrorists themselves.

The military and the state have come out with the choice among the different groups of the Taliban by referring to them as "good Taliban and bad Taliban" as an excuse to tolerate or justify the killing of innocent people. The military has a clear policy on the Afghan Taliban as being the good Taliban to keep them in their fold for future "strategic depth". Interestingly, the Afghan Taliban has never denied that the Pakistani Taliban are not associated with them nor condemned them for conducting such deadly and inhuman incidents.

In the presence of such suicide attacks and blasts on the markets and other religious places the government has recently decided to enter into a dialogue with the Taliban. Taking the weaknesses of

the government and political parties the Taliban have killed the army officers in the bordering area of Afghanistan inside Pakistan including one four star general. The Taliban have retired army officers in their midst who get information of the movement of the security forces and other secret information from their “friends” inside the army or its spy agencies.

The killing of Christians was also connected with the unconditional release of one Taliban leader Mulla Ghani Brother, the leader of the Taliban, who remained under detention for several years after a deal with the president of Afghanistan who visited Pakistan last month. The Taliban took his release as a victory. The government of Pakistan released him hoping to start a dialogue with the Taliban.

The exercise of having dialogue with the Taliban, the friends of future strategic depth, has proved futile in the presence of such incidents of suicide attacks and threats to eliminate Christians. There is no evidence that the Taliban have agreed to accept the dialogue with the government of Pakistan but they have clearly demonstrated that they would not agreed to any sane step. Despite the fact of the killings the Pakistani government continues to labour under the false belief that the Taliban will talk to them and the killings will cease.

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\* About AHRC: The Asian Human Rights Commission is a regional non-governmental organisation that monitors human rights in Asia, documents violations and advocates for justice and institutional reform to ensure the protection and promotion of these rights. The Hong Kong-based group was founded in 1984.