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Pakistan: Killing of Ahmadis continues amid impunity

Amnesty International fears that the perpetrators of Friday's attack on an Ahmadi mosque may go unpunished and that such attacks will continue unless the Pakistan authorities respond quickly to bring the perpetrators to justice and take steps to protect Ahmadis against future attack.

The continued violence against the Ahmadiyya community in Pakistan has again been illustrated in an attack on worshippers in a mosque in the village of Mong, near the town of Mandi Behaaddin in Punjab Province, on 7 October 2005. Eight people were killed and at least 18 injured in the attack. Police have reported that three masked men approached the mosque on a motorcycle before entering the mosque and firing on those gathered for Friday prayers. Witnesses report that the men then escaped on the motorcycle leaving eight dead and many people crying and covered in blood.

Police investigations of previous targeted killings of Ahmadis in Pakistan have been slow or have not taken place at all. In many cases the perpetrators have not been brought to justice. Amnesty International believes that the government's consistent failure to investigate attacks and killings of members of religious minorities fails to discourage further human rights abuses against such groups. The right to freedom of religion, as laid down in the Pakistani constitution and in international human rights law, must be made a reality for all religious minorities in Pakistan.

Over the years Amnesty International has been informed of numerous targeted killings of Ahmadis, usually carried out with impunity. In some cases, the targeted Ahmadis themselves were subjected to criminal charges. In one incident in October 2000, eight Ahmadis were murdered in the village of Ghatialian, Sialkot district, in an incident similar to that of 7 October 2005. In October 2000 gunmen opened fire on Ahmadis while they were gathered at a mosque for worship. Five Ahmadis who witnessed the attack and reported the incident to the police, along with 21 other Ahmadis, were arrested and many of them are still serving life sentences for what Amnesty International believes to be false charges. None of the gunmen were ever arrested or brought to justice.

Background

Ahmadis are considered heretical by orthodox Muslims in Pakistan but see themselves as Muslim. The Ahmadiyya community was declared non-Muslim in Pakistan in 1974 and a number of laws were subsequently passed which make it a criminal offence for Ahmadis to profess, practice and preach their faith. Dozens of Ahmadis have been charged with religious offences, including calling for prayers, preaching their faith or calling their place of worship a 'mosque'. Several have been charged with blasphemy under section 295C of the Pakistani Penal Code (PPC), which carries the mandatory death penalty. So far all death sentences for blasphemy have been overturned by the higher judiciary.

Amnesty International has appealed to successive governments of Pakistan to abolish the laws

relating to religious offences, which effectively criminalize any exercise of the right to freedom of religion by Ahmadis and the blasphemy law under section 295C PPC.