

PUBLIC

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To: Health professional coordinators

From: Medical team / Asia Program

Date: 17 December 2002

MEDICAL ACTION
Targeted killings of health professionals
Pakistan

Key words extrajudicial execution / doctors / nurses

Summary

In mid-March 2002 when an Amnesty International delegation reached Karachi, the largest city in Pakistan, three doctors from the Shi'a minority community¹ had been shot dead, three had survived attempts on their lives and seven had reportedly migrated within the previous week.

The targeting of doctors from the small Shi'a minority community on the grounds of religion or cultural identity is not a new phenomenon in Pakistan. However, since Pakistan declared its support for the US-led coalition against 'terrorism', there has been a further increase in systematic killings of members of the Shi'a community (including doctors), Christians and Westerners unconnected with sectarian strife. The perpetrators of these killings are believed to be Islamists².

The Government of Pakistan³ has on several occasions condemned sectarian violence. Amnesty International believes, however, that the government has systematically failed to exercise due diligence when it failed to prevent abuses against specific religious communities, to investigate such abuses and to punish the perpetrators.

¹ The Shi'a sect of Islam traces its origins to the dispute over the succession to Muhammad, the prophet of Islam; the Shi'a maintain that Ali Ibn Abu Talib, cousin and son-in-law of Muhammad, was the rightful heir to the office of the caliph. The main difference between the Shi'a and Sunni sects lies in the importance assigned to the imams, the descendants of Muhammad through his daughter Fatima, whom Shi'a regard as infallible leaders of the Muslim community – which the Sunnis deny.

² The term 'Islamist' is used for those who believe in the superiority of the Muslim faith and use political means and sometimes violence to spread it; it is used to distinguish such people from Muslims who peacefully profess and practise their faith.

³ References to the 'Government of Pakistan' relate to the government of Pervez Musharraf who from October 1999 to October 2002 held the offices of Chief Executive and President. Amnesty International addresses its recommendations to the new government which emerged from general elections on 10 October.

Recommendations

Please write letters in English or your own language to the authorities below, using professionally-headed paper if you use this in your profession:

- Introducing yourself in your professional capacity and/or as a member of Amnesty International;
- Acknowledging the difficult legacy of sectarian strife the new government has inherited;
- Urging the government to make a public statement that sectarian violence, including killings of doctors and nurses, will no longer be tolerated under the new government;
- Calling on the government to immediately establish an impartial and thorough investigation into threats of violence and killings of health professionals; to bring the perpetrators to justice; and to allocate more resources to the police for this purpose;
- Urging the government to provide protection to health professionals and their families if they request if following threats of violence towards them.

Addresses

The Prime Minister

Mir Zafarullah Jamali

Office of the Prime Minister
Islamabad Secretariat
Islamabad
Pakistan

Salutation: Dear Prime Minister

Mian Khurshid Mahmud Kasuri

Minister for Foreign Affairs with additional charge for Law, Justice and Human Rights

Ministry for Foreign Affairs
Constitution Avenue
Islamabad
Fax: (+9251) 9202518, 9224205, 9224206
E-mail: pak.fm@usa.net

Salutation: Dear Minister

Copies of appeals

Mohammad Naseer Khan

Minister for Health

Office of the Minister for Health
Block C, Pakistan Secretariat, Islamabad
Fax: (+9251) 9213933, 9205481

Salutation: Dear Minister

Syed Jamal Shah
Inspector General of Police
Office of the Inspector General
Police Headquarters
Karachi

email: igp@sindhpolice.gov.pk

Salutation: Dear Inspector General

and to diplomatic representatives of Pakistan accredited to your country.

Contacting your medical / nurses associations

Please contact your national medical and nurses' association

- Drawing their attention to Amnesty International's recent report on Pakistan and the accompanying action on behalf of health professionals in Pakistan;
- Asking the medical association to write to their colleagues at the Pakistan Medical Association (PMA), expressing their solidarity and sending a copy of their letter to the World Medical Association (WMA):

Dr Delon Human
Secretary General
World Medical Association
BP 63
01212 Ferney-Voltaire Cedex
France
Fax: +33 450 405937
E-mail: info@wma.net

If you receive no reply from the government or other recipients within two months of dispatch of your letter, please send a follow-up letter seeking a response, referring to your previous letter(s). Please check with the medical team if you are sending appeals after 25 January 2003, and send copies of any replies you do receive to the International Secretariat (att: medical team).

Monitoring of actions

If you have access to e-mail you can help our attempt to monitor letter writing actions. If you write one, two or more letters please send us an e-mail and let us know. Please write in the subject line of your e-mail the index number of the action and the number of letters you write e.g. ASA 33/031/2002 -3

Please send your message to medical@amnesty.org

Thank you.

To: Health professional coordinators

From: Medical team / Asia program

Date: 17 December 2002

MEDICAL CONCERN
Targeted killings of health professionals
Pakistan

Introduction

In mid-March 2002 when an Amnesty International delegation reached Karachi, the largest city in Pakistan, three doctors from the Shi'a minority community⁴ had been shot dead, three had survived attempts on their lives and seven had reportedly migrated within the previous week. Several doctors who Amnesty International spoke to had closed their clinics and sent their families abroad. One doctor said to Amnesty International, "it is better to stop earning than to stop living".

The targeting of doctors from the small Shi'a minority community on the grounds of religion or cultural identity is not a new phenomenon in Pakistan. However, since Pakistan declared its support for the US-led coalition against 'terrorism', there has been a further in systematic killings of members of the Shi'a community (including doctors), Christians and Westerners unconnected with sectarian strife. Some of the Christians targeted have included nurses working in a Christian hospital. The fact that they were nurses may not have been the reason for the attack on them, whereas the doctors are clearly targeted due to their double identity as members of the Shi'a minority community and their profession. The perpetrators of these killings are believed to be Islamists⁵.

The Government of Pakistan⁶ has on several occasions condemned sectarian violence. Amnesty International believes, however, that the government has systematically failed to exercise due diligence when it failed to prevent abuses against specific religious communities, to investigate such abuses and to punish the perpetrators.

⁴ The Shi'a sect of Islam traces its origins to the dispute over the succession to Muhammad, the prophet of Islam; the Shi'a maintain that Ali Ibn Abu Talib, cousin and son-in-law of Muhammad, was the rightful heir to the office of the caliph. The main difference between the Shi'a and Sunni sects lies in the importance assigned to the imams, the descendants of Muhammad through his daughter Fatima, whom Shi'a regard as infallible leaders of the Muslim community – which the Sunnis deny.

⁵ The term 'Islamist' is used for those who believe in the superiority of the Muslim faith and use political means and sometimes violence to spread it; it is used to distinguish such people from Muslims who peacefully profess and practise their faith.

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Reasons for targeted killings of Shi'a doctors

The Pakistan Medical Association (PMA) stated in March 2002 that more than 70 doctors had been murdered in Karachi during the past 10 years, the majority of whom were from the Shi'a community. Shi'a make up between five and 10 per cent of the population of Pakistan, Christians some three to five per cent whereas Sunnis comprise around 85 per cent of the population.

Relatives of Shi'a victims have told Amnesty International that they believe that Sunni militant organizations target community leaders and admired role models in order to debilitate the community by making it leaderless and drive its members out of the country or discourage those already abroad from returning to Pakistan. Members of the Shi'a community have told Amnesty International that the community has many educated members. The decimation of the most educated elite of this minority community deeply impacts on its sense of security.

Relatives of Shi'a doctors have pointed out to Amnesty International again and again how easy it is to target doctors, particularly Shi'a doctors, many of whom are well known and have a distinct profile for professional achievement and social commitments. Many provide free medical assistance not only to their Shi'a co-religionists but to society at large. Their name boards outside their clinics give them away, their working hours are regular and they must keep themselves accessible to the public. Many specialist doctors in Karachi who typically have teaching assignments in medical colleges in the morning, hospital duties in the afternoon and their private practice in the evenings, have tried to vary their routines. Some have reduced or stopped their evening practices; others have changed their cars or hired private guards.

Political analysts in Pakistan told Amnesty International that the killing of Shi'a doctors and other Shi'a professionals appeared to be part of the motive of militant sectarian groups to send a signal that they would not tolerate government attempts to curtail their activities.

Cases of killings and attempted killings

The Citizen Police Liaison Committee listed eight doctors killed in 2000 and seven killed in 2001.

One of the doctors killed in 2001 was Dr Raza Jafri (39), who was shot dead on 31 May 2001 as he was leaving his clinic in Karachi. A bearded man in his 30s reportedly asked staff for the whereabouts of Dr. Jafri, went straight up to him, took out a pistol and shot him dead. Dr. Jafri died on the spot. According to his family, Dr Jafri had no personal enemies and had not received an indication that he might be targeted. Most of his welfare activities, which included financial support for needy people, benefited members of both the Shi'a and Sunni communities.

In 2002 the following Shi'a doctors have been killed, but other deaths may have gone unreported:

- *On 4 February, Dr. Fayyaz Karim, a dermatologist, was shot dead at Khawaja Ajmer Nagri, Karachi;*
- *On 12 February, Dr. Syed Rashid Mehdi was shot dead in Karachi;*
- *On 4 March, Dr. Alay Safdar Zaidi was shot dead in Karachi;*
- *On 7 March, Dr. Manzoor Ahmed Sumoo was shot dead in Karachi;*
- *On 9 March, Dr. Yousuf Ghori was shot dead in Karachi.*

Dr. Alay Safdar Zaidi (42), was shot dead on 4 March 2002 when his car stopped at a traffic light in the centre of Karachi on his way to work. Two men on a motorbike drew up and opened fire. Dr. Zaidi had no political connections, no religious office and no personal enemies. One of three highly qualified nephrologists in Karachi, Dr. Zaidi had some eight months earlier returned to Pakistan after an 11-year stay in the USA. He was committed to improving medical care in Pakistan and making it affordable for poorer sections of society. He was working to introduce cheap dialysis methods and had plans to open a new kidney centre in Karachi. Dr Zaidi had received threatening phone calls in October 2001 and as a precaution had begun to change his daily route.

In Karachi, the Amnesty International delegation also met a the widow of **Dr. Syed Rashid Mehdi** (39), a chest physician. On 12 February 2002, at 10.30 p.m. on his way home from his practice, he was shot three times in the head from close range as he sat in his car next to a pharmacy where he had stopped. He died immediately. He was not involved in any religious or political activities but had throughout his life focussed on his studies and professional development. There had been no threats or any other incidents that could have alerted him to the danger to his life.

Some doctors have escaped attacks on their lives, some badly injured. **Dr. Jafer Naqvi**, a 60-year-old kidney specialist escaped in March 2002 when two men on a motorbike closed in on him in Karachi. As the car was fired at, it swerved and. Dr. Naqvi and two doctors accompanying him jumped out and hid in a private house. The presence of a police mobile van in the area may have led to the attackers fleeing.

Another doctor, **Dr. Syed Mujavir Ali Rizvi**, was the target of shootings twice and is now confined to a wheelchair. Dr. Rizvi and his wife, Dr. Goher Sultana, also a medical doctor, set up a clinic in Karachi in 1983 where a year later, on 16 June 1984, he was shot at by several Islamists. A bullet injured his spinal chord leaving him paralysed. After one and a half years of physiotherapy, he succeeded in moving about in a wheelchair and, with the encouragement of his wife, returned to his practice in 1995. On 30 January 2002, Islamists shot him once again as his wife was about to drive him home from the clinic. Still partly paralyzed from the first attack, he was an easy target and sustained several bullet injuries. Dr. Rizvi survived this attack as well but has one bullet still lodged in his shoulder. Since then Dr. Rizvi, his wife and their three children have mostly stayed at home as they are afraid of further attacks. The family was not given police protection at any stage despite repeated attacks on their lives and death threats.

Five nurses were also killed on the basis of their religion. On 9 August 2002 in Taxila, Punjab province, three men threw hand grenades at members of the Christian congregation as they emerged from the chapel of the Presbyterian Missionary Hospital after morning prayers. Five Pakistani nurses and one of the attackers were killed and at least 25 others were injured.

Some non-Shi'a doctors have also been killed, either deliberately in a revenge action or when they were mistaken for Shi'as. The targeted killing of **Dr. Anwarul Islam**, a Sunni, occurred after four Shi'a doctors had been killed in targeted shootings in Karachi shortly before. On 13 March 2002, Anwarul Islam, an ear, nose and throat specialist, was killed by motorcyclists in Karachi as he left his clinic in the city centre in the evening. Dr Isirat Hussain, a Sunni, was killed on 8 July 2002, apparently because his name was mistaken for a Shi'a name.

Impact on health care provision

Given that there are about 7,000 doctors for Karachi's population of 14 million, resulting in one general practitioner for every 2,000 people and one specialist for 230,000 persons and that it takes about 15 years to train a specialist,⁷ it becomes evident that the attacks, killings of doctors and their flight from Karachi bear a high social and economic cost. While those who target doctors on sectarian grounds abuse a range of rights of their victims, including the rights to life and security of the person as well as the right to work without risk and interference, they also abuse the right to health of large

⁷ Figures provided by the PMA.

sections of society. Doctors of the PMA have also pointed out that the loss of professors of medicine in Punjab was a difficult setback for the profession.

Protest of Pakistan Medical Association

Outrage at the targeted killings of Shi'a doctors has been widely shared in Pakistan. On 22 March 2002, the PMA went on a one day strike to protest against what they saw as the government's indifference to the fate of doctors, particularly Shi'a doctors in Karachi and all major government and private hospitals closed all but emergency facilities. In response the government agreed to issue firearms licences to doctors. A further strike was held on 8 April 2002. The PMA said on that occasion that the government could soon find the country deprived of doctors, particularly specialists. A Joint Action Committee involving representatives of several human rights organisations on 16 March 2002 passed a resolution which it sent to the government; the resolution says *inter alia*: "Targeted killings on the basis of religion should be condemned without reservation. Of particular concern is the trend towards killing medical professionals. We demand that the government firmly control the menace and re-establish the rule of law."

Amnesty International's recommendations

Amnesty International believes that the government of Pakistan has systematically failed to exercise due diligence when it failed to take adequate measures to prevent killings of doctors by Islamist groups. The authorities failed to investigate threats and use of violence by such groups and to bring perpetrators to justice.

Security measures to protect doctors and their families who might be targeted have been non-existent or inadequate. Police investigations have either not been opened following threats or violence or have been unsuccessful due to a number of reasons, including lack of training for police in interrogation skills, fear for the safety of police officers involved in the investigation or possible collusion of some police officers with sectarian groups

Amnesty International calls on the new Government of Pakistan to promptly, independently and impartially investigate every report of sectarian violence and related threats and to ensure that those identified as perpetrators are brought to justice.

For further information please see the Amnesty International report: Pakistan. No protection against targeted killings (October 2002, ASA 33/30/2002).