

Pakistan: More Ahmadis killed as government continues to ignore religious violence

Just 10 days after the murder of five members of the Ahmadiyya community in Pakistan, another five Ahmadis, including two children, were murdered in their mosque in Sargodha district.

"The official silence around the religiously motivated murders on 30 October and the lack of police investigation have directly contributed to a climate in which extremists feel encouraged to harass, attack and kill members of the country's religious minorities," Amnesty International said today.

As in the case of the earlier attack on village Ghatialian, months of tension over religious issues preceded the latest incident in village Takht Hazara in Sargodha district, Punjab. The local authorities took no action against anti-Ahmadi demonstrations and desecration of Ahmadi graves by orthodox Muslims led by the local mullah. They advised Ahmadis who approached them for help to remain calm but took no protective or preventive measures.

In the early hours of Friday 10 November, the mullah led a mob through the streets shouting anti-Ahmadi slogans. As they approached the Ahmadi mosque, people inside phoned police asking for protection. The mob swelled quickly, broke into the mosque and attacked and killed four Ahmadis, mutilating their bodies with axes. They then ransacked the building and set it on fire. One of the injured persons, a 14-year-old schoolboy, later died of his injuries. The police arrived when the incident was over.

"How many more people have to die for their religion before the Government of Pakistan takes action and clearly and publicly states that such violence will not be tolerated? Freedom of religion is a right laid down in the country's Constitution -- it is time this was made a reality," Amnesty International said.

Background

Ahmadis are considered heretical by orthodox Muslims in Pakistan but see themselves as Muslim. The Ahmadiyya community was declared non-Muslim 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 which carries the mandatory death penalty. This year in Sialkot district alone, criminal cases based on religion were brought against 23 Ahmadis.

Police investigation of some 20 killings of Ahmadis over the past seven years have been slow or did not take place at all; not one of the perpetrators has been brought to justice. Amnesty International has been informed that no police investigation has so far taken place into the killing of five Ahmadis in Ghatialian village on 30 October.

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