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Pakistan: Lahore attack shows government must do more to protect civilians

The attack by armed men on the Sri Lankan cricket team in the centre of Lahore on Tuesday is yet another stark example of the failure of the Pakistan authorities to protect the right to life of civilians – foreign and national – said Amnesty International today.

Amnesty International condemned the armed attack on the Sri Lankan team and its police escort which reportedly left a driver and six policemen killed, while eight members of the Sri-Lankan cricket team were injured.

“The Pakistani authorities have a responsibility to prevent armed groups from posing a threat to the life and safety of its population and foreign nationals. Any attack aimed at civilians, including sportspeople, cannot be justified.” said Amnesty International.

The attack occurred at 9,00am on the Liberty Square roundabout in Lahore’s centre as the team’s coach and its police escort were on route to Gaddafi Stadium for a test match. Up to 14 armed men, carrying assault rifles and rocket propelled grenades positioned around Liberty Square, carried out the assault which lasted around 25 minutes.

No group, as yet, has claimed responsibility but it is feared that militants linked to either Laskhar-e-Taiba, the Taleban or al-Qa’ida were behind the attack.

Amnesty International urges the Pakistan government to conduct an independent and impartial investigation into the Lahore attack, as well as into previous unlawful killings, armed and suicide attacks. Those suspected of perpetrating the attacks must be brought to justice in trials which meet international standards of fairness and without recourse to the death penalty.

Background:

Since 2001, Pakistan’s security has been increasingly eroded with neo-Taleban groups gaining ground in parts of the country. Pakistani Taleban insurgent groups have steadily increased their control in the Federally Administrated Tribal Areas (FATA) and in Malakand and Swat Valley in the Northwest Frontier province. These areas have become a haven for foreign and national insurgents to rearm and regroup, from where they launch attacks on Afghan and international forces across the border in Afghanistan and on government and other targets inside Pakistan.

The February truce between the government and Taliban militants in Malakand and Swat valley, only served to emboldened militants.

In addition to the Lahore incident, Pakistan has witnessed several major attacks in the recent past, including the assassination of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto in December 2007 at a rally in Rawalpindi which killed 20 others and the September 2008 attack on Marriot hotel in Islamabad in which 54 people died.

Public Document

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