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Amnesty International condemns the twin attacks on Ahmadi places of worship in Lahore

Amnesty International strongly condemns the twin attacks on two Ahmadi places of worship in Lahore today and calls for increased and meaningful protection for the country's religious minorities.

The organization also calls on the Pakistan government to carry out a thorough independent and impartial investigation into the brutal attacks on the two places of worship in Garhi Shahu and Model Town in Lahore in which at least 70 people were reportedly killed and 78 injured.

According to members of the Ahmadi community, the Dharul Zikr is the largest Ahmadi place of worship in Lahore, with 1,500 to 2000 worshippers. Ahmadi sources told Amnesty International that among the dead were the President, Vice President and Missionary of Dharul Zikr.

An Ahmadi source told Amnesty International that the attack coincides with the anniversary of the death of the community's founder, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad Qadiani, who is believed to have passed away on 26 May 1908.

There have been contradictory reports in the media as to which group was behind the attack despite an earlier statement by the Punjab Taliban claiming responsibility. Some of the gunmen remain at large.

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan in a statement said that it had repeatedly warned the Punjab Chief Minister of threats against the Ahmadi community centre in Model Town in Lahore for more than a year, calling for "enhanced security measures to protect the vulnerable minority and its places of worship" which has come under increasing attack in tandem with the rise of religious extremism in the country.

Background

The Ahmadiyya are a religious group who consider themselves a part of Islam, although many mainstream Muslim groups view them as not adhering to the accepted belief system. In 1974, Pakistan's parliament passed a new law declaring the Ahmadi non-Muslims. Attacks on religious minorities have been compounded by the country's blasphemy laws that have fostered a climate of religiously-motivated violence and persecution. Accusations of blasphemy have frequently resulted in the murder of both Muslims and members of religious minorities.

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