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Pakistan: Cycle of sectarian violence demands government action

Amnesty International condemned today's attack on a Shia community meeting in Punjab province which killed 12 women and children and injured dozens of others.

"The authorities must condemn the attack, find out who is responsible and make every effort to bring the perpetrators to justice. The cycle of sectarian violence will only be broken if the government makes a concerted effort to investigate, prosecute and protect victims and witnesses," the organization said.

Sectarian violence has cost scores of lives over the past year; the Shiite minority has been particularly at risk of harassment and violence. Shia professionals, particularly doctors, have been frequently targeted in the last year for killing by religious opponents. Repeated attempts by the government to come to grips with groups promoting such violence have been mostly unsuccessful.

The Government of Pakistan has repeatedly announced, but needs to fully implement, plans to reform the *madrassas* (Islamic seminaries), some of which have provided militant training; to reduce the glut of arms; and to prosecute and punish anyone found responsible for religiously motivated violence.

For background see: *Pakistan: Insufficient protection of religious minorities*,
<http://web.amnesty.org/ai.nsf/recent/ASA330082001?OpenDocument>

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