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Pakistan: Execution will not resolve sectarian violence

The death penalty will not resolve the ongoing violence between Sunni and Shiite extremists, Amnesty International said today calling on the Government of Pakistan to stop the execution of Haq Nawaz, scheduled for the morning of 28 February 2001 at Mianwali Jail in central Punjab province.

Haq Nawaz, a Sunni activist from the Sipah-i-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP, a militant Sunni organization), was originally sentenced to death for the killing of Sadiq Ganji, director of the Iranian Cultural Centre, in Lahore on 19 December 1990. The order for Haq Nawaz's execution has come after the Supreme Court rejected his appeals and the President turned down his mercy petition.

Over the past few years, hundreds of people, many of them unarmed civilians from either the Sunni or Shiite communities, have been killed in Pakistan in violence between the two groups.

"While the Government of Pakistan must take decisive action to end the sectarian violence that has killed dozens this year alone, the death penalty does not serve this purpose," Amnesty International said. "On the contrary, the use of the death penalty only encourages the cycle of violence to continue as sectarian groups seek revenge for those executed."

Recent violence and government action also demonstrate that the use of the death penalty is not having a deterrent effect against the ongoing sectarian violence. In anticipation of retaliatory violence for the execution of Haq Nawaz, between 875 and 1,200 SSP activists have reportedly been arrested since Saturday. Meanwhile on Monday, a Shiite doctor was killed by a gunman on a motorcycle near Multan, Punjab province, in a suspected sectarian murder.

Background:

Amnesty International opposes the death penalty unconditionally, in all circumstances and wherever it occurs throughout the world. Executions by the state reinforce the culture of violence which it is supposed to prevent. Even judicial systems with extensive legal safeguards, make the irrevocable nature of the death penalty particularly problematic -- in all jurisdictions there have been cases where innocent people have been executed.

The death penalty has never been shown to be an effective deterrent against violent crime. Scientific studies have consistently failed to find convincing evidence that the death penalty deters crime -- least of all politically-motivated crime -- more effectively than other punishments.

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