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## **Pakistan should protect Ahmaddiya community against threats of violence**

Pakistani authorities must do more to protect the Ahmaddiya community, Amnesty International said today amid threats from religious groups to block Ahmadis from entering their place of worship in Rawalpindi on Friday.

An Ahmadi spokesperson yesterday said local religious groups have warned they will not allow Ahmadis to carry out religious activities this Friday, local media reported.

The call comes a week after some 5,000 people demonstrated in favour of demolition of the Ewan-e-Tauheed, one of the largest Ahmadi places of worship in the city of Rawalpindi.

“A real test of the authorities' commitment to human rights is whether Ahmadis and other religious minority groups in Pakistan are able to freely practice their religion. The authorities must ensure that Ahmadis, like all Pakistanis, are not prevented from exercising their right to practice their religion freely,” said Sam Zarifi, Asia-Pacific Director of Amnesty International.

“Police provided some protection to the Ewan-e-Tauheed to ensure its safety during last Friday’s rally. That is an important immediate step, but the Pakistani government must do a lot more to address and reverse the widespread, systematic campaign of vilification against religious minorities in Pakistan,” he added.

In 2010, the authorities ignored repeated warnings and failed to prevent attacks on two Ahmadi places of worship in Lahore, which killed 93 people.

Ahmadi graves have been damaged across the Punjab, with around two dozen desecrated in one instance in December last year alone. Last month, several graves were reportedly damaged in Quetta, in the province of Balochistan.

Last Friday’s rally, which was organized by traders’ unions and religious groups including Jamaatud Dawa, Jamaat-i-Islami and Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaawas, was also attended by Zia Ullah Shah, a member of the Punjab Assembly from the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz political party that is in government in the province.

“With general elections likely in Pakistan later this year, political parties must resist the temptation to look for easy votes off the back of the hostility whipped up against Ahmadis or other religious minorities,” he added.

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 Ahmadis non-Muslims and in 1984 they were legally barred from proselytising or identifying themselves as Muslims.

Dozens of Ahmadis have been charged with religious offences, including calling for prayers, preaching their faith or calling their place of worship a 'mosque'.

Attacks on religious minorities have been compounded by the Pakistan'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.