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PAKISTAN CSW renews call for repeal of blasphemy laws

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) is renewing its call for the repeal of Pakistan's blasphemy laws on the anniversary of the anti-Christian attacks in Gojra and Korian, and following the recent extra-judicial killing of two Christians falsely accused of blasphemy.

The religiously-motivated violence in Gojra and Korian, Punjab Province, took place between 30 July and 1 August 2009. Eight people died, including six in their burning house, and over 100 houses were destroyed after a spurious blasphemy accusation triggered mob violence against the Christian community. One year on, the perpetrators have not been convicted and continue to wield enough power in the area to intimidate local Christians. Some Christians have gone into hiding or fled.

On 19 July, Rashid and Sajid Emmanuel were shot dead outside a court in Faisalabad while in police custody. They had been accused of blasphemy against the Prophet Mohammed, but initial investigations had already revealed that the accusations were fabricated. Their deaths sparked rallies in Lahore and Karachi calling for justice in their case, and in that of Christian nurse Magdaline Ashraf, who was allegedly raped by a Muslim doctor and thrown from a hospital window. Protestors also called for the repeal of the controversial blasphemy laws.

Pakistan's blasphemy laws are frequently misused against people of all faiths for personal vendettas or the pursuit of extremist agendas. Following the murders of the two Christians, Minister for Minorities Affairs Shahbaz Bhatti held a press conference on 20 July where he spoke out strongly against the misuse of the blasphemy laws, leading to threats against his life by an extremist Muslim cleric in Sindh.

CSW's National Director Stuart Windsor said, "The blasphemy laws are a danger to all Pakistanis and an affront to the rule of law, particularly sections 295B and C. In both of the above cases, Islamists from outside the affected areas were involved and mosque loudspeakers used to incite further violence on the basis of the accusations. This legislation is now freely wielded as a tool with which to spread fear. We call upon the Government of Pakistan to repeal the blasphemy laws and to ensure justice is done for all victims."