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PAKISTAN | No justice one year after assassination of Shahbaz Bhatti

Today marks the first anniversary of the brutal killing of Shahbaz Bhatti, Pakistan's Federal Minister for Minorities Affairs, who was shot by Islamist extremists on 2 March 2011 for his opposition to the country's blasphemy laws and his support of a Christian blasphemy defendant.

A memorial for Shahbaz Bhatti is being held today in his home village of Khushpur, Punjab. This will be followed a few days later by another event in Islamabad and attendees are expected to include political colleagues and members of the diplomatic community, with whom Bhatti had forged close links. Pakistani Christians in the UK and around the world are also marking the anniversary.

Mervyn Thomas, Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) Chief Executive said, "We pay tribute to our friend Shahbaz, whom we miss dearly, and our thoughts and prayers are with his family and friends at this time. We continue to draw inspiration from his commitment both as a grassroots activist and a politician, not to mention his faith. He was utterly committed to making justice and equality a reality in the lives of Pakistan's minorities."

Bhatti's killers are yet to be caught, and announcements from the investigative team have thus far been overshadowed by inconsistency and speculation, including in the most recent arrests in February. Bhatti's long-term friends and associates at the All Pakistan Minorities Alliance (APMA), which he co-founded in 2002, are recommending that all memorial events should highlight the lack of progress in the hunt for his killers, stating that "a mockery has been made of the investigation". APMA continues to call for a judicial commission of inquiry to be established, as was done in the case of murdered journalist Shahzad Saleem.

Mervyn Thomas added, "It is crucial that his murder investigation reaches a satisfactory conclusion, not only to do justice and honor the memory of Shahbaz himself, but also to make it clear that the rule of law still means something in Pakistan. At stake is the ability and willingness of the Pakistani state to stand up against those taking justice into their own hands, including those who target religious minorities with confidence that they will never be held to account."

Notes to Editors:

1. CSW's briefing, [Pakistan: Religious freedom in the shadow of extremism](#), examines how rising religious extremism in Pakistan has catapulted some of the country's primary religious freedom concerns into the public consciousness, in a context relevant to Pakistanis of all faiths; two examples of this have been the assassinations of prominent politicians Shahbaz Bhatti and Salmaan Taseer for their opposition to the country's blasphemy laws.
2. Although a candlelit procession and vigil will be held in Islamabad today, the main memorial event was not scheduled for the day of the anniversary because it coincides with Pakistan's Senate elections. This round of elections will be the first to include four seats for religious minorities, one from each province, a measure secured by Shahbaz Bhatti while he was minister.
3. For further details about the life of Shahbaz Bhatti, see his [obituary](#) in the Guardian, written by CSW's Annabelle Bentham.