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## PAKISTAN Violent lynching “demonstrates ongoing power of blasphemy accusations”

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A mentally unstable man was beaten to death and his body burned by a mob in Pakistan’s Punjab province on July 3, following a blasphemy accusation made against him.

The victim, Ghulam Abbas, had been taken into police custody in the Bahawalpur district of Punjab after being accused of desecrating a copy of the Qur’an. Mosque loudspeakers were used to spread the accusation and a mob said to be in the thousands gathered at the police station, eventually overpowering police, beating the man to death and burning his body.

According to reports, the victim was a Muslim from an extremely poor background who was known locally to have mental health problems.

Police have since named around 2,000 men in a First Information Report (FIR) covering the killing and related injuries sustained by police officers and damage to property. They are yet to make any arrests.

Police in Quetta narrowly averted a similar incident involving a mentally unstable man only last month.

Statistically, most of those accused of blasphemy in Pakistan are from Muslim backgrounds, although religious minorities such as Christians make up a disproportionate number of victims. The life of the accused is at risk from sympathizers of the accuser as soon as the allegation is publically known, and even after acquittal. The state has long been silent on the issue and many sections of civil society currently consider it too volatile to tackle through public channels.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide’s (CSW’s) Advocacy Director, Andrew Johnston, said, “This cruel killing demonstrates the ongoing power of blasphemy accusations in Pakistan to incense large numbers of people unconnected with the accused, and with little regard for the truth. Once the message had spread, this victim’s mental state was not a consideration. Incidents of this kind are only likely to increase unless the state is seen to punish those who incite and enact such violence. However, investment in frontline police staff and community leaders is crucial if these incidents are to be prevented in the first place and Pakistan’s education sector has a pivotal role to play in countering the mindsets behind such aggression. We call upon the international community to support Pakistan in this.”