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PAKISTAN | Justice, Compensation Called For Near All Saints Church Bombing Anniversary

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) is calling on the Pakistani government to fulfill its pledge to compensate the victims of the attack on All Saints Church in Peshawar, ahead of the anniversary of the bombing that took place on Sept. 22, 2013.

CSW's call for justice and compensation echoes the Pakistan Supreme Court ruling on June 19, which ordered the federal government to compensate the victims swiftly and emphasized the need for a "Special Police Force to be established with professional training to protect the places of worship of minorities."

In what is widely acknowledged as the worst attack on a church in Pakistan's history, two suicide bombers detonated their explosives in quick succession as around 600 worshipers were leaving All Saints Church, Kohati Gate, near Qissa Khawani Bazar in the Old City of Peshawar on Sept. 22, 2013. The explosives were laden with deadly ball bearings and designed to kill and maim as many as possible. Eighty-five people died immediately, while the death toll from injuries sustained during the blasts currently stands at 98. Over 150 people were injured.

Bishop Humphrey Peters of Peshawar informed CSW that the year since the bombing has seen "the minority church, struggling for security, justice, identity and survival."

Despite many promises of aid, victims of the bombing have yet to receive adequate support. Many who still needed care were forcibly removed from hospitals in the months following the attack. They were unable to pay bills since the compensation promised by the government had not come.

On Sept. 10, 2014, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) Governor distributed compensation checks from the Sindh provincial government. Sums of \$4,916 were issued to families of the deceased and \$2,950 were given to the injured. The federal government in Islamabad has yet to fulfill its pledge to pay almost \$2 million into an endowment for the orphans and widows.

The Punjabi Taliban, which recently renounced its violent struggle to implement Sharia in Pakistan but pledged to continue its fight in Afghanistan, is considered to be behind the All Saints Church bombing and other sectarian attacks, including the assassination of Federal Minister for Minorities Shahbaz Bhatti in March 2011.

The difficulties faced by Muslim and non-Muslim minorities in Pakistan are mostly the work of extremist groups that flourish in areas of the country where governmental power structures do not function effectively. CSW's recent briefing on Pakistan highlights the fact that increasing

sectarian violence, a volatile society, lack of accountability, perpetrator impunity and the widespread societal influence and control of unchecked extremist groups has exacerbated the situation to intolerable levels.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "Ahead of the anniversary of the Peshawar church bombings, CSW stands in solidarity with the victims of this horrendous crime and calls for justice to be served and compensation to be delivered without further delay. We urge the Government of Pakistan to be proactive in combating the threat of extremism, and to enact the ruling of the Supreme Court, in order to ensure protection for places of worship and communities of minority faiths."