



3.15.15

## PAKISTAN | Two Churches Bombed in Lahore

Initial reports indicate at least 14 people were killed and 68 wounded after two churches were bombed March 15 in Youhanabad, a Christian neighborhood in Lahore, Pakistan.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) is calling for the perpetrators to be apprehended and held to account, and for the Pakistani government to learn the lessons from the 2013 twin suicide attacks on All Saints Church in Peshawar that killed 180 people. The government has yet to fulfill its pledge to bring justice to those victims, including delivering on its pledge of compensation.

The attacks in Lahore draw attention to concerns about the security of churches and Christian institutions in the country. Religious minorities in Pakistan face pervasive societal and institutional discrimination and the threat of violence, fuelled in part by expressions of religious hatred, or hate speech. Influential leaders, from grassroots religious clerics to MPs and federal ministers, have been known openly to incite violence against non-Muslim minorities or minority Muslim sects. This situation is exacerbated by a culture of impunity and the unchecked influence of extremist groups. The Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) splinter group Jamatul Ahrar has claimed responsibility for today's church bombings.

In a statement, Rev. Fr. Emmanuel Yousaf Mani, National Director of The National Commission for Justice and Peace (NCJP), and Executive Director Cecil Shane Chaudhry, noted that TTP has killed many Christians, adding, "We as a nation need to stand with the families of the victims and stop extremism jointly; this misuse of religion as an excuse to kill minority should be stopped. We demand that provincial and federal government take serious and effective measure to protect minority community of Pakistan."

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "We extend our deepest condolences to those who loved ones and the many injured in today's church bombings in Lahore. Lessons must be learned from the 2013 attacks in Peshawar; the perpetrators must be held to account and the Pakistani government must act swiftly to address the attacks on minority religious groups in the country and be proactive in ensuring protection for places of worship."