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PAKISTAN | Government Urged to Tackle Roots of Violence Against Minorities

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) called on the Pakistani government to tackle the root causes of violence against minorities and to ensure the perpetrators of attacks, such as the church bombings in Lahore on March 15, are held to account.

Tensions between Christians and Muslims are high following the bombing of two churches March 15 in Youhanabad, a Christian neighborhood in Lahore, in which 17 people were killed and at least 70 were wounded. There were reports of violence at Christian protests in Lahore following the bombings and two people were killed in suspected reprisal attacks. Protests also took place in Sargodha, Faisalabad and Gujranwala in Eastern Pakistan.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "CSW stands in solidarity with the Christian community in Pakistan and extend our heartfelt condolences to those who lost loved ones in the church attacks and the aftermath. We echo the calls of civil society in Pakistan for peace to prevail and call on the authorities to hold those responsible for this deplorable act to account."

"However, the government must go further to tackle the root causes of violence against religious minorities if it is to stem these attacks, which occur against a backdrop of unchecked extremism and institutional, legal and societal discrimination against minorities. A culture of impunity means that the victims of such attacks have scant hope for justice – and this must end if religious minorities are to be guaranteed their rights as equal citizens in Pakistan."

CSW received reports that in the aftermath of the church bombings, local mosques in Youhanabad were broadcasting messages inciting violence against the Christian community. This is not uncommon. Influential leaders, from grassroots religious clerics to MPs and federal ministers, are known to openly incite violence against non-Muslim minorities or minority Muslim sects in Pakistan. These expressions of religious hatred or hate speech are also a factor stoking violence against religious minorities.

At the United Nations Human Rights Council this week, CSW is raising the issue of hate speech with country delegations and in oral statements. CSW is also lobbying the Pakistani government directly as part of the Retune campaign.