



1.28.16

PAKISTAN | Inquiry Called for in Christian's Death

Christian Solidarity Worldwide is calling for an inquiry and charges to be brought against those responsible for the death of Liaqat Masih, a 35 year-old Christian man, who died following his illegal detention and torture in a Pakistani prison.

Liaqat Masih, who worked as the driver for Raza Hameed, the son of Gujranwala politician S.A Hameed, was arrested Nov. 15 following accusations of theft. Although Raza Hameed had initially lodged the complaint against unknown perpetrators, he later registered a case against Liaqat Masih after becoming suspicious of him. The police arrested Masih's son, Khurram Sunil, on Dec. 27.

Masih was held in judicial remand at Gujranwala police station without evidence or trial until Jan. 10 when the police claimed there was new evidence allowing his case to proceed. His family was uncertain of his location for four days before it heard he was being held in a private torture cell in Gujranwala Cantt police station.

On Jan. 8, Khurram Sunil was released on bail until Jan. 19. He was rearrested Jan. 10 and named as an accomplice in the theft.

Masih died in police custody Jan. 14. Although the police postmortem states he died of a heart attack, his son claims his father was brutally beaten on the night he died and sustained fatal injuries after being hung upside down by a rope.

The police released Masih's body to his family Jan. 15 but withheld a copy of the autopsy. His family claims the 24-hour delay gave the police time to remove evidence of torture, prompting a public protest from Masih's brother and a number of other Christians, who were later dispersed violently by the police.

Masih's death is part of a pattern of extrajudicial killings of Christians who are routinely discriminated against in Pakistan.

In a statement, Michelle Chaudhry, President of the Cecil & Iris Chaudhry Foundation (CICF), said: “We at CICF stand in unanimity with the bereaved family of Liaqat Masih, who died under mysterious circumstances while in police custody. We cannot accept the claims made by the police that Liaqat Masih died of a heart attack, unless an independent inquiry into the incident is carried out, along with a third-party post-mortem at a private hospital in order to bring the facts to light.”

CSW’s Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, “Our thoughts and prayers are with Liaqat Masih’s family. We echo their calls and those of CICF for an impartial autopsy, an independent investigation into his death and for those responsible to be prosecuted. We urge the Chief Minister of Punjab to ensure that police follow proper investigative procedures. Liaqat Masih’s case is symptomatic of a deteriorating situation for religious minorities in Pakistan which requires urgent attention at the highest levels of government.”