



3.15.16

## PAKISTAN | CSW Calls for Investigation on Bombing Anniversary

One year after the bombings of St John's Church and Christ Church in Youhanabad, Lahore, that killed 15 and injured 70, Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) is calling for a full, impartial investigation by Pakistan's authorities and for the perpetrators to be brought to justice.

During protests following the church bombings March 15, 2015 in Youhanabad, a predominantly Christian area of Lahore, two Muslim men, suspected to be connected to the bombings, were lynched by a mob.

The Punjab government quickly launched an operation to apprehend those suspected of the lynching and in the last 12 months, over 100 young men were arrested from Youhanabad and are facing trial in the fast-track anti-terrorists courts. Arrests are still being made.

Doubts have been raised by civil society about police impartiality as they have relied heavily on video and mobile phone footage and made arrests without warrants. There are also concerns about the excessive force used by police while conducting their investigations and they have been accused of detaining people illegally.

One man, who was detained by the police, told CSW that "the police arrested all the youth, telling these young men that they were on a list. They were randomly picking up suspects to fulfil a quota, there was pressure from the Chief Minister to make arrests so the police were out to arrest anyone they could get."

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, fueled 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.

CSW urged Pakistan's government to enact the recommendations of a 2014 Pakistan Supreme Court judgement to set up a special taskforce for minorities, take effective measures to curb hate speech and develop appropriate curricula to promote religious and social tolerance.

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, "On the first anniversary of the double church bombing in Youhanabad, no one has yet been held to account for this crime. We urge the Pakistani government to launch a full enquiry into the bombings and to ensure that the police adhere to due process both in bringing the perpetrators to account and in apprehending those who killed the two Muslim men in the aftermath of the attack. We also urge the government to enact the Supreme Court recommendations to ensure that the rights of religious minorities in Pakistan are upheld."