



8.11.16

## PAKISTAN | Lawyers Increasingly Threatened

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) expressed concern about the threat posed by extremists to Pakistan's legal community following the bombing of the Civil Hospital in Quetta on Aug. 8, which left 70 people dead.

On Aug. 8, the government-administered Civil Hospital in Quetta, Balochistan, was targeted by a suicide bomber, leaving at least 70 people dead, mostly lawyers who had gathered there to mourn the death of the president of the Balochistan Bar Association (BBA), Bilal Anwar Kasi. He was assassinated on his way to court earlier the same day.

Those killed in the blast included the former president of the BBA, Baaz Muhammad Khan Kakar, former General Secretary of the BBA, Bashir Zehri, and Daud Kasi, Chairman of the BBA Executive Committee. Several others killed in the blast were nominees for senior positions in the upcoming BBA elections Aug. 13. The militant group, Jamaat-ur-Ahrar, which is a split from Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, took responsibility for the attack. The blast also claimed the lives of two journalists and several civilians.

Kasi condemned the recent killings of lawyers in Quetta and called for a boycott of the court proceedings. Lawyers in Balochistan have been the target of violent extremism in the past decade. A number of female and constitutional lawyers have been gunned down on account of their work.

After a country visit in 2012, the Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers, Gabriela Knaul, noted that members of the legal profession were at serious risk of threats, attacks and killings by militant groups. Stating that the State had not provided any protection to secure their lives and safety, she emphasized that the protection of lawyers is of utmost importance. CSW observed that the level of threats against and attacks on lawyers has persisted with impunity in recent years and puts the role of lawyers in restoring the rule of law in Pakistan at risk.

I.A. Rehman, the Secretary General of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, said, "The State has completely failed to deal with the campaign on terrorism by accusing foreign involvement in these attacks. Islamists extremist groups are even more coordinated and have demonstrated their organized power to kill high profile targets. There is more trouble for

Pakistan now as lawyers are being targeted thus, totally undermining our legal system. The government must go beyond their mere promises to tighten security and see to it that Islamists extremism is dealt with.”

CSW's Chief Executive Mervyn Thomas said, “Our thoughts and prayers go out to the families of those who were killed. We are deeply concerned by the threats against lawyers in Pakistan, who are advocates for justice and the protection of the rights of their fellow citizens including the right to religious freedom. These extremist groups not only imperil the lives of innocent lawyers who are simply doing their job, but also Pakistan’s legal system. We urge the government of Pakistan to deal decisively with Islamic extremism threat and to end the climate of fear which threatens Pakistan’s legal and social fabric.”