



7.26.2010

PAKISTAN Protests against misuse of blasphemy laws

Protests took place yesterday in Lahore and Karachi in Pakistan in the wake of the shooting of two Christians accused of blasphemy, Rashid and Sajid Emmanuel.

Hundreds of Christians and other minorities and human rights organizations took to the streets to call for justice for Rashid and Sajid Emmanuel, and for Christian nurse Magdaline Ashraf, who was raped by a Muslim doctor and thrown out of a hospital window. They also called for the repeal of the controversial blasphemy law.

The rallies were coordinated by the All Pakistan Minorities Alliance (APMA). Father Emmanuel, the National Director of the Justice and Peace Commission was in attendance, along with Father Abid Habib, Chair of the Justice and Peace Commission in Multan. Long-term human rights activist and APMA Group Captain Cecil Chaudhry led the protest in Lahore and spoke out strongly against the killing of Rashid and Sajid Emmanuel. He also criticized the death threats against the Minister for Minorities Affairs, Shahbaz Bhatti, whose firm stance against the blasphemy laws led to a direct and public threat against his life being made by an extremist Muslim cleric in Sindh.

Rashid and Sajid Emmanuel were shot while in police custody outside court in Faisalabad on 19 July. A police official was also wounded in the incident. They had been accused of blasphemy against the Prophet Mohammed but initial investigations had already revealed that the accusations were fabricated. The Minister for Minorities Affairs, Shahbaz Bhatti, held a press conference on 20 July at which he spoke out strongly against the misuse of the blasphemy laws at the root of the incident.

There has been civil unrest in the affected areas of Faisalabad both in connection with the accusations and the murders. The President of Pakistan and Chief Justice of Lahore have made statements on the case and police officials have been charged with negligence.

Christian Solidarity Worldwide's (CSW's) National Director Stuart Windsor said, "The killing of Rashid and Sajid Emmanuel should not have happened and the scale of the reaction to it reflects this. The blasphemy laws are contributing to a dangerous long-term shift in social norms which makes it acceptable to fabricate blasphemy allegations against another person despite the severe, life threatening implications of such actions. We call upon the government of Pakistan to take action against those misusing the laws as well as those threatening Minister Bhatti."