

Gunmen Kill World Vision Workers in Pakistan

Islamic Gunmen Kill Christian Aid Workers in Pakistan

Suspected Islamic militants

armed with guns and grenades stormed the offices of a Christian relief and development organization in northwest Pakistan today, killing six aid workers and wounding seven others.

The gunmen besieged the offices of international humanitarian organization World Vision near Oghi, about 50 miles north of Islamabad in Mansehra district of the North West Frontier Province (NWFP). Police and World Vision's regional spokesman said the Pakistani staff members, including two women, were killed after up to 15 gunmen arrived in pick-up trucks and began firing.

"They gathered all of us in one room," World Vision administration officer Mohammad Sajid, who was in the office at the time, told Compass. "The gunmen, some of whom had their faces covered, also snatched our mobile phones. They dragged people one by one and shifted them to an adjacent room and shot and killed them."

Rienk van Velzen, World Vision's regional communications director, said from the Netherlands that all staff members in the office were Pakistanis. He said one is

missing.

The organization has been operating in the area since October 2005, when aid workers flooded into the northwest after an earthquake killed more than 73,000 people and left about 3.5 million homeless.

But many charities have since left the area as Islamist violence soared. In February 2008, four aid workers with the British-based group Plan International were killed in a similar gun and grenade attack in Mansehra town.

Police said the militants escaped into the hills.

"Police rushed to the area after receiving information about the attack, but the attackers managed to flee," senior police officer Waqar Ahmed said. "We chased them, there was an exchange of fire, but the gunmen escaped into the mountains."

Ahmed blamed the attack on "the same people who are destroying our schools" – a reference to Taliban militants opposed to co-education who have blown up hundreds of schools across the northwest in the past three years.

"Now they want to disturb relief work in quake-hit areas," Ahmed said.

World Vision's website says the aid group is "inspired by our Christian values" but

stresses that it
does not proselytize or predicate aid on a person's faith.

Foreign targets are
rarely attacked directly in Pakistan, despite the chronic
insecurity in the
nuclear-armed, Muslim state, which is a key ally in the war on
Al Qaeda
and the Taliban in neighboring Afghanistan.

A wave of suicide and
bomb attacks across Pakistan has killed more than 3,000 people
since 2007. Blame
has fallen on Taliban and Al Qaeda-linked militants bitterly
opposed to the
alliance with the United States.

The United Nations
decided last year to relocate a limited number of its
international staff from
Pakistan because of security concerns.

The UN's World Food
Program office in Islamabad was attacked in October last year,
with five aid
workers killed in a suicide bombing.

Then on Feb. 3, a bomb
attack in the NWFP district of Lower Dir killed three U.S.
soldiers and five
other people at the opening of a school just rebuilt with
Western funding after
an Islamist attack.

Elsewhere in the
northwest today, police found the bodies of two men the
Taliban had accused of
spying for the United States. The local tribesmen had been
snatched last month

from Mir Ali in North Waziristan tribal region, and their “bullet-riddled bodies were found dumped under a bridge,” police officer Dildar Khan said.