

Christian Father of 4 Murdered Before His Family's Eyes

A Catholic father of four children was gunned down by Muslim neighbors last week after he objected to their harassment of Christians in the area, his family said.

Marshall Masih of the Patiala House area in Lahore, Pakistan, was the sole breadwinner for his elderly parents, wife and four children, the oldest 10, the youngest 18 months old. He was 29.

His sister, Goshi Yaqoob, 33, said his family was asleep at 4:25 a.m. Wednesday (July 10) when four armed Muslims led by Muhammad Shani and Azam Ali entered their house from the rooftop after cutting the iron grill.

"The assailants broke the door of my brother's bedroom on the first floor of the house and held him and his family hostage on gunpoint," Yaqoob told Christian Daily International-Morning Star News. "They then opened indiscriminate fire on him, riddling his body with 16 bullets in the presence of his wife and minor children."

Yaqoob was at her parent's house at that time. The sound of gunfire and the screams of her sister-in-law and children woke her up, and she rushed to their house, where she saw four men heading to the roof. She went to her brother's bedroom.

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"I was horrified to see his blood-soaked body lying on the floor while his wife and children were huddled in a corner crying frantically," she said, breaking down in tears.

Neighbors awakened by the screams helped the family take the critically injured Masih to the hospital, where he died from bleeding and the wounds to his organs, she said.

Masih, known as Buntty, had filed a police complaint against Shani two and a half months earlier after repeated, unsuccessful attempts to dissuade him and his cohorts from regular aerial firing in the area and harassing Christian women, she said.

"Though the police arrested Shani and recovered illegal weapons from his possession, he was freed after a day without any case," Yaqoob said. "Instead, the police pressured my brother to stop pursuing the matter. The Muslims were offended that a Christian had taken a stand against their criminal activities, and by killing him in cold blood, they have shown that our lives do not matter."

Christians held a protest outside the office of the Punjab Province chief minister the same day demanding swift justice.

"But our pleas have fallen on deaf ears, and so far none of the accused murderers have been arrested," she said.

Her father, a retired sanitation worker, is 75 and recently underwent heart surgery, and the family is concerned about the future of Masih's children and young widow.

"My brother was the sole provider for the family, but with his untimely death, we are clueless as to how his young widow and four children will survive now," she said. "Our entire world has crumbled after this incident."

She appealed to the provincial government and to Christians for support.

"We are in dire need of help. My father's meager pension cannot support the family, especially the education and well-being of the children, as well as the legal battle to bring

the killers to justice,” she said. “I appeal to the government to give education scholarships to the children and urge my fellow Christians to help us in whatever way possible so that we can get justice from the courts.”

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Masih ran a small grocery store out of his house and had a good reputation among the 20 Christian families living in the area for more than three decades, his sister said.

“We are three sisters, and Masih was our only brother, the youngest of the four siblings,” she said. “He was a God-fearing Catholic who worked very hard to provide a livelihood for our parents, both of whom are heart patients, and his family.”

Rise in Violence

There has been an increase in violent crimes against Christians in Pakistan since attacks on multiple churches and homes of Christians in Jaranwala on Aug. 16, when two brothers were falsely accused of blasphemy. Some of the attacks have also been attributed to the Israel-Palestine conflict following the Hamas terrorist attack on Oct. 7, as Christians are seen as being sympathetic towards Jews.

On Nov. 9, a 20-year-old Christian, Farhan Ul Qamar, was allegedly shot dead by a Muslim, Muhammad Zubair, in his house in Talwandi Inayat Khan village, Pasrur tehsil of Sialkot District, Punjab Province, in the presence of his parents. Qamar’s father said Zubair showed hatred for Christians and Jews, mistakenly referring to the family as Jews as he ranted at them before allegedly killing the Christian.

A 14-year-old Christian boy was gunned down by Muslims in the Mandiala Warraich area of Gujranwala District, Punjab

Province, on Feb. 5, in an attack purportedly motivated by the Jaranwala incident.

The victim, Sunil Masih, was standing in the market with some family members when the assailants arrived on motorcycles. They allegedly shouted that no Christian in the area should be left alive and opened fire, killing Masih on the spot while others barely managed to save their lives.

Pakistan ranked seventh on Open Doors' 2024 World Watch List of the most difficult places to be a Christian, as it was the previous year.

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