

American Doctor Shot Dead in Pakistan in Suspected Sectarian Attack

An American volunteer cardiologist was shot dead in Pakistan on Monday, a member of his minority Ahmadi community said, in the latest attack on a group that says it is Muslim but whose religion is rejected by the state.

Mehdi Ali Qamar had taken his wife, young son and a cousin to a graveyard in Punjab province at dawn to pray when he was shot, said Salim ud Din, a spokesman for the Ahmadi community.

"He came here just one or two days ago to work at our heart hospital, to serve humanity and for his country," Din said. "Two persons came on motorbikes. They shot 11 bullets in him."

Qamar was born in Pakistan but moved abroad in 1996. He had returned to do voluntary work at a state-of-the-art heart hospital built by the Ahmadi community in the eastern town of Rabwah.

Qamar, 50, moved to Columbus, Ohio, in the United States, where he founded an Ahmadi center and raised funds for medical charities in Pakistan, Din said.

He is survived by a wife and three young sons, Din said.

The U.S. embassy said it was providing consular assistance but declined to give further details.

"We express our deepest condolences to his family and friends," the embassy spokeswoman said.

The Ahmadis believe there was a Prophet after Mohammed. Pakistani law says they are not Muslims, although Ahmadis insist that they are.

Ahmadis have often been jailed or lynched for blasphemy for things such as offering Islamic prayers or reading the Quran.

Qamar's killing follows the fatal shooting of a 61-year-old Ahmadi man last week. A teenage gunman killed Khalil Ahmad in police custody after the grandfather was arrested on blasphemy charges for objecting to stickers denouncing his religion.

Blasphemy carries the death penalty in Pakistan and cases against both religious minorities and Muslims are rising.

Some mullahs promise that killing Ahmadis earns a place in heaven and give out leaflets listing their home addresses. Few attacks are ever solved, even when the victims can identify their attackers.

Seven Ahmadis were killed and 16 survived attempted assassinations last year, according to an annual report produced by the Ahmadi community in Pakistan.

Others were driven from their homes or had businesses seized.

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