

Church Screening of 'Jesus Film' Attacked in Pakistan

✖ Some 50 Muslim villagers armed with clubs and axes attacked a showing of the *Jesus Film* near Sargodha, Pakistan, on Wednesday night, injuring three part-time evangelists and four Christians in attendance.

Two of the evangelists were said to be seriously injured. The Muslim hardliners also damaged a movie projector, burned reels of the film and absconded with the public address system and donations from Christian viewers in Chak village, about 10 kilometers northeast of Sargodha, at 7 p.m.

Officers at the Saddr police station refused to register a case against the Muslim assailants, sources said.

Compass observed three part-time evangelists—Ishtiaq Bhatti, Imtiaz Ghauri and Kaleem Ghulam—screening the film within the premises of the Catholic Church of Chak, which sits within the police precincts of Saddr police station-Sargodha. Bhatti said the church compound was crammed with Christian villagers clapping as the film showed Jesus Christ performing miracles, raising the dead, casting out evil spirits and healing ailments.

Injured Christians were taken to the Basic Health Unit (BHU) of Chak village. Bhatti was treated for minor injuries, while Ghauri and Ghulam sustained serious injuries for which they received treatment at another hospital.

The evangelists who were screening the film said from their clinic beds that a Muslim cleric instigated the Muslim villagers, who were armed with clubs, spades and axes.

“They charged on us deadly and swiftly and left us injured and broke all our appliances and took away funds collected by

congregants to help us," Bhatti said. "Muslim men also injured those Christian villagers who tried to intervene and stop them."

The intervention of Chaudhary Nassar-Ullah Cheema, headman of the village, resulted in the rescue of the Christian evangelists and the surrender of the Muslim mob, sources told Compass. The Muslim hardliners were forced to evacuate the church grounds, but only after a stand-off of nearly two hours.

Eyewitnesses who requested anonymity told Compass that numerous Muslim villagers and their clerics had gathered outside the church compound as the film played, with some of them climbing trees to get a clearer view of the screen. The eyewitnesses said that as soon as the Muslim attackers watched the resurrection and ascension of Christ, they became enraged because their version of Islam forbids portraying an image of a living thing and especially that of a prophet.

The sources added that although Muslims hold Christ as a prophet, they believe he was never crucified, having been replaced by a man identical to him.

No doctor was initially available for the four injured Christian viewers and three preachers who were taken to the BHU of Chak, but a male nurse treated their wounds and allowed them to go home. Ghauri and Ghulam sustained critical injuries and were transferred to District Headquarters Hospital in Sargodha.

Asad Masih, a local Christian leader, told Compass that they tried to register a case against Muslim villagers for thrashing (Article 337 of the Pakistan Penal Code) stealing (Article 380), recovery of the stolen items (411) and desecrating the church building, but police scornfully rejected their application. Officers peremptorily told them to settle the dispute in a local jury of village elders, he said.

Inspector Azeem Warriach of Saddr police station told Compass that registration of a case against a large number of Muslim villagers would further create a break-down of law and order.

“Therefore, I’ve directed them to solve the problem at the local level so that they might reconcile and live in perfect peace and harmony,” he said.