

Evangelist Shot Dead in Pakistan

An evangelist was shot dead in Pakistan on Wednesday by an unidentified gunman in what his family believes was a radical Muslim group's targeting of a Christian.

Zahid Jameel, 25, told Compass that his father, Jameel Saawan, and a helper were opening the doors of their cosmetics shop in the Gulshan-e-Iqbal area of Pakistan's commercial hub of Karachi on Wednesday morning when a young man appeared and shot his father, first in the neck and then in the face.

The assassin fled on a motorcycle on which two people were waiting, keeping watch for him, Jameel said.

"We firmly believe that my father was killed because of his preaching of the Bible, because there is no other reason," Jameel said.

His father had not spoken of any threats on his life in recent weeks, though he had received threats after voicing his desire to start a welfare organization for poor Christians in the Essanagri area of Karachi two years ago, Jameel said.

"That could not materialize after he started receiving threats from some unknown forces," Jameel said. "We do not know who threatened him, but my mother persuaded him not to put his life in danger, for our sake."

Nevertheless, Jameel said that his father continued to preach and was widely respected for being a vocal supporter of the Christian community.

"We live in a rented apartment and our shops are also on lease. We don't have any property, and no enemies, which is why we are shocked by our father's killing," he said. "It

wasn't a robbery, because the assassin only walked towards my father and shot at him."

Zahid said that his mother was in a state of shock, as were his three sisters and older brother, Shahid.

"Our father has been gunned down for no reason at all," Jameel said. "He used to share the Word with Muslims, but I have never heard that he entered into an argument with any person."

Jameel said that the family had moved to Karachi from Quetta about 10 years ago, with his father starting the cosmetics business two years later.

"My father was a very religious man, and some years ago he decided that it was time for him to reach out to the people and share the Good News with them," he said. "Every day he would visit several families to share the Word of God and was very content with his life."

His father used to sit with him at his shop from 11 a.m. until 3 p.m., then go off to visit Christian families to share the Bible, Jameel said. On the day of the murder, however, his father reached the shop 15 minutes ahead of him.

"The young boy who helps me in my shop told us that he was opening the locks of the other door when he heard a gunshot," he said. "The boy then saw my father trying to grasp the assailant, but the man fired another bullet that hit my father in the cheek and exited from the back of his head, killing him instantly."

Michael Javed, a former member of the Sindh provincial assembly, told Compass that he had known the victim for several years, as both of them are from Quetta.

"Saawan was a very good man and was always eager to help his community," Javed said. "I also think that he was killed by some religious forces, because he had shared with me once that

he was receiving threats from some quarters.”

The former legislator said that no one had come forward to record statements with the police because of fears for their security, and it was highly unlikely that Saawan’s killers would be caught.

“There used to be quite a few cases of such nature in Sindh, but now the situation for minorities is worsening,” he said. “The government needs to make efforts to provide security to our people.”

Napolean Qayyum of the Pakistan People’s Party Minorities Wing told Compass that the PPP-led Sindh government would make all possible efforts to apprehend Saawan’s killers.

“President Asif Zardari’s spokesman has told me that the president had tasked Sindh Home Minister Manzoor Wassan to investigate the incident and report back to him,” he said, adding that Wassan was likely to visit the family today.

Sharing Life Ministry’s Sohail Johnson said he regretted that the killing of the evangelist would instill further fear in Christians in the city.

“Pastor Saawan’s brutal murder shows that the forces of extremism and intolerance will go to any extent to disrupt peace and harmony in Pakistan,” he said.

Although police registered the case on Wednesday, they have yet to make any progress in the investigation, sources said.

Saawan’s family was preparing for his burial Friday, still holding onto some hope that one day his killers will be brought to justice.