

Muslims Beat Christian With Rods for Refusing Islam

Two Christian men were seriously injured by young Muslim men this month in Karachi when they refused to convert to Islam, a family member told Compass.

Liaqat Munawar, a resident of Essa Nagri in Karachi, told Compass by telephone that his brother, Ishfaq Munawar, and another young Christian man, Naeem Masih, were returning home after an early morning prayer service at their church in Sohrab Goth on Aug. 14, Pakistan's Independence Day, when ethnic Pashtun youths near Sea View harassed and later attacked them.

"Ishfaq and Naeem were riding a motorcycle when six Pashtun youths signaled them to stop," Liaqat Munawar said. "They asked the two boys to identify themselves. Ishfaq told them that they were Christians returning from their church after a special prayer service."

The Muslims asked them why they were in Sea View, and they replied that they had made a brief stopover to participate in Independence Day celebrations at the beach, he said.

"The Pashtun youths then started questioning them about their faith and later tried to force them to recite the *Kalma* [Islamic conversion creed] and become Muslims, telling them that this was the only way they could live peacefully in the city," Liaqat Munawar said. "They also offered monetary incentives and 'protection' to Ishfaq and Naeem, but the two refused to renounce Christianity."

After cajoling the two Christians for some time, the Pashtuns sat in a white car parked nearby and eventually drove away. Ishfaq Munawar and Masih got back onto their motorcycle and were about to start it, Liaqat Munawar said, when suddenly the

young Muslims reversed their car and rammed it into the Christians.

“The Muslims got out of the car armed with iron rods and attacked Ishfaq and Naeem, shouting that they should either recite the Kalma or be prepared to die,” Liaqat Munawar said.

He said the Pashtuns severely beat the two Christians, fracturing Ishfaq Munawar’s jaw and breaking five teeth, and seriously injuring Masih. He added that the two Christians fell unconscious, and the young Muslim men left assuming they had killed them.

Liaqat Munawar said his brother underwent jaw surgery at Abbasi Shaheed Hospital and is now recovering. He said the family had not registered a case with police, fearing reprisal by the Muslims, but were now considering filing a formal complaint.

This was not the first time Liaqat Munawar’s family has witnessed religious violence, he said, as Pashtun Muslims last year attacked his cousin, Eric Sarwar, founder and executive director of the Tehillim School of Church Music and Worship, which is affiliated with the Presbyterian Church of Pakistan.

Liaqat Munawar also spoke of an incident in which Muslim Pashtuns shot at a Christian funeral passing through their area without any reason, injuring six Christians.

Elvis Steven, a Christian rights activist in Karachi, told Compass that he was in contact with the Munawar family, and that although he had yet to speak with the victims directly, he would attempt all possible means to have the assailants arrested.

“The situation is not that bad for Christians living in areas controlled by the Muttahida Qaumi Movement [MQM], but those living in areas dominated by the Pashtuns are under constant threat,” Steven said. “The Pashtuns are extremist in their

beliefs. They have a militant mindset, and there have been several incidents of religious violence involving the Pashtuns in Karachi.”

While this violence was clearly religiously motivated, Karachi, Pakistan’s financial hub, has been roiled by ethnic violence this year. Ethnic gangs backed by political parties have reportedly ratcheted up their turf wars, with the MQM, said to represent the majority ethnic Mohajirs, increasingly assailed by Pashtun and ethnic Baloch gangs.

Political parties representing all three groups, including the MQM, are fighting over rights to extort money from businesses and homes in Karachi, violence that some have falsely portrayed as religiously motivated violence.

Christians make up only percent of Pakistan’s population, which is more than 95 percent Muslim, according to *Operation World*.