

Muslims Order Christians to Leave Village in Pakistan

The head of a Muslim village last week ordered 250 Christian families to leave their homes in Khanewal district, Punjab Province, local residents said.

Abdul Sattar Khan, head of village No. 123/10R, Katcha Khoh, and other area Muslim residents ordered the expulsions after Christian residents objected too strenuously to sexual assaults by Muslims on Christian girls and women, said Emmanuel Masih, a locally elected Christian official.

Most of the village's Christian men work in the fields of Muslim land owners, while most of the Christian women and girls work as servants in the homes of Muslim families, said Rasheed Masih, a Christian in the village who added that the impoverished Christians were living in appalling conditions.

The Muslim employers have used their positions of power to routinely sexually assault the Christian women and girls, whose complaints grew so shrill that four Christian men, Emmanuel Masih, Rasheed Masih, his younger brother Shehzad Anjum and Yousaf Masih Khokhar "sternly confronted the Muslims, only to be told that all Christians were to leave the village at once.

"The Muslim villagers came to us with the expulsion order only after Christian women and girls raised a hue and cry when they became totally exasperated because they were sexually attacked or forced to commit adultery by Muslims on a daily basis," said Khokhar, a Christian political leader.

Khokhar said the unanimous decision to compel the Christians to leave their homes and relocate them was possible because the Christians were completely subject to the Muslims' power.

"The Muslims had been telling the Christian women and girls that if they denied them sex, they would kick them out of their native village," Emmanuel Masih added.

Christians created the colony when they began settling in the area in about 1950, said Anjum. Since then the migration of Muslims to the area has left the Christians a minority among the 6,000 residents of the village, said Emmanuel Masih.

"There is no church building or any worship place for Christians, and neither is there any burial place for Christians," Emmanuel Masih said.

He said that the Rev. Pervez Qaiser of village No. 231, the Rev. Frank Masih of village No. 133 and the Rev. Sharif Masih of village No. 36, Mian Channu, have been visiting the village on Sundays to lead services at the houses of the Christian villagers, who open their homes by turns.

Asked why they didn't contact local Katcha Khoh police for help, Emmanuel Masih and Khokhar said that filing a complaint against Muslim village head Khan and other Muslims would only result in police registering false charges against them under Pakistan's notorious "blasphemy" statutes.

"They might arrest us," Khokhar said, "and the situation would be worse for the Christian villagers who are already living a deplorably pathetic life under the shadow of fear and death, as they [the Muslims] would not be in police lock-up or would be out on bail, due to their riches and influence, very soon."

That very fate befell two Christian couples in Gulshan-e-Iqbal town, Karachi, who had approached police with complaints against Muslims for falsely accusing them of blasphemy.

On May 28, a judge directed Peer Ilahi Bakhsh (PIB) police to file charges of desecrating the Quran against Atiq Joseph and Qaiser William after a mob of armed Islamists went through their home's garbage looking for pages of the Islamic

scripture among clean-up debris.

Additional District and Sessions Judge (east) Sadiq Hussein directed the PIB police station in Gulshan-e-Iqbal to file a case against Joseph and William, newlyweds who along with their wives had shared a rented home and are now in hiding. The judge acted on the application of Muslim Munir Ahmed. Â

Saleem Khurshid Khokhar, a Christian provincial legislator in Sindh, and Khalid Gill, head of the All Pakistan Minorities Alliance in Punjab, said that police were threatening and harassing relatives and close friends of Joseph and William to reveal their whereabouts.

Islamists armed with pistols and rifles had waited for the two Christian couples to return to their rented home on May 21, seeking to kill them after the couples complained to police that the radical Muslims had falsely accused them of desecrating the Quran.

The blasphemy laws include Section 295-A for injuring religious feelings, 295-B for defiling the Quran and 295-C for blaspheming Muhammad, the prophet of Islamâ€”all of which have often been misused by fanatical Muslims to settle personal scores against Christians.

Maximum punishment for violation of Section 295-A, as well as for Section 295-B (defiling the Quran), is life imprisonment; for violating Section 295-C the maximum punishment is death, though life imprisonment is also possible.

In village 123/10R in Khanewal district, Anjum noted that it is only 14 miles from Shanti Nagar, where Muslims launched an attack on Christians in 1997 that burned hundreds of homes and 13 church buildings.

Yousaf Masih added, “Muslim villagers have made the life a hell for Christians at village 123/10R.