

Pakistani Christian Beaten for Refusing to Convert to Islam

✖ The four older Muslim brothers of a 26-year-old Christian beat him unconscious in Kallur Kot, Pakistan, earlier this month because he refused their enticements to convert to Islam, the victim told Compass.

Riaz Masih, whose Christian parents died when he was a boy, said his continual refusal to convert infuriated his siblings and the Muslim cleric who raised them, Moulvi Peer Akram-Ullah. On Feb. 8, he said, his brothers ransacked his house in this Punjab Province town 145 miles southwest of Islamabad.

"They threatened that it was the breaking point now, and that I must convert right now or face death," Masih said. "They said killing an infidel is not a sin, instead it's righteousness in the sight of Allah almighty."

Masih begged them to give him a few minutes to consider converting and then tried to escape, but they grabbed him and beat him with bamboo clubs, leaving him for dead, he said.

"They vented their fury and left me, thinking that I was dead, but God Almighty resuscitated me to impart His good news of life," he said.

Masih told Compass that his brothers and Akram-Ullah have been trying to coerce him to convert to Islam since his brothers converted.

"They had been coercing me to embrace Islam since the time of their recantation of Christianity," Masih said, "but for the last one month they began to escalate immense pressure on me to convert."

He grew up with no chance to attend church services because of his siblings' conversion to Islam, he said, adding that in any event there was no church where he grew up. He knew two Christian families, however, and he said his love for the Christian faith in which he was originally raised grew as he persistently refused to convert to Islam.

He said Akram-Ullah and his brothers offered him 1 million rupees (or \$11,790), a spacious residence and a woman of his choice to marry in order to lure him to Islam, but he declined.

The Muslim cleric had converted Masih's brothers and sisters in like manner, according to human rights organization Rays of Development (ROD), which has provided financial, medical and moral support to Masih. ROD began assisting Masih after a chapter of the Christian Welfare Organization (CWO) brought the injured Christian to ROD.

A spokesman for CWO who requested anonymity told Compass that Akram-Ullah had offered Masih's brothers and sister a large plot of residential land, as well as 500,000 rupees (US\$5,895) each, if they would recite the kalimah, the profession of faith for converting to Islam.

"He never accepted the Islamic cleric's invitation to Islam, although his newly converted Muslim sister and four elder brothers escalated pressure on him to convert, as well, and live with them as a joint family," the CWO spokesman said.

Adnan Saeed, an executive member of ROD, told Compass that when Masih's parents, carpenter George Albert and his wife Stella Albert, passed away, Masih and his siblings were tenants of Akram-Ullah, who cared for them and inculcated them with Islamic ideology.

Saeed said that when they converted, Masih's now 37-year-old sister, Kathryn Albert, adopted the Islamic name of Aysha Bibi; Masih's brothers—Alliyas Masih, 35, Yaqoub Masih, 33,

Nasir Masih, 31, and Gullfam Masih, 28â€”adopted their new Islamic names of Muhammad Alliyas, Abdullah, Nasir Saeed and Gullfam Hassan respectively.

Masih's family attempted to kill him, Saeed said. A ROD team visited Masih at an undisclosed location and, besides the support they have given him, they are searching for a way to provide him legal assistance as well, Saeed said.

Masih said that because of Islamist hostilities, it would be unsafe for him to go to a police station or even a hospital for treatment. A well-to-do Christian has given shelter to him at an undisclosed location.

In hiding, Masih said that his brothers and Akram-Ullah are still hunting for him.

“Since they have discovered that I was alive and hiding somewhere, they are on the hunt for me,” he said. “And if they found me, they would surely kill me.”