

Pastor Killed Outside His Own Church Faced Death Threats Leading Up to the Murder

The son of a church leader shot dead in northwestern India on Saturday (July 15) has revealed that his father had received threats that if he continued to preach, he would be killed.

Alisha Masih, 22, who is also training to be a pastor, said his father, Sultan, who was 47, had received threats (from unknown sources) via WhatsApp and Facebook. He added that his father had recently asked a friend to pray for him in light of these threats.

Alisha said that following an anniversary celebration for his church in May—to which local churches had been invited—his father had been approached by a group of men who had asked him where he had found the money to pay for the function (about 800 had turned up), and whether he would give them something if they converted to Christianity.

He said his father told them he would not give them anything, and that those who had converted had done so only because they had come to believe in Jesus.

Sultan Masih was on the phone when he was shot, standing outside his Temple of God Church in Ludhiana—the largest city in India's Punjab state.

"We don't know if the phone call was connected to his murder," Alisha said, "But the people who killed him were surely monitoring his activities because they waited for the time until he was alone."

Sultan Masih had been pastor of the church for 20 years and also ran a school for the poor from inside the church. He

leaves a wife and four children—two of whom were adopted.

“Our father was a courageous man, and he was never afraid to die for Jesus,” Alisha said. “He has put the same zeal in us. Our family will continue to serve God.”

Hundreds of Christians took to the streets on Sunday (July 16), blocking off a major national highway (the road to Jalandhar) for three hours, and only ceasing once they had received assurances from the police that the perpetrators would be brought to justice.

Sultan Masih was buried the next day, after the Christians had received reassurances that the perpetrators would be brought to justice.

Paul Tamizharasan, a close friend of his, told World Watch Monitor following the funeral: “Family members are grieving, and we hope the government will catch the accused. We demand answers and have gone to the Punjab government, but they couldn’t find who did this.

“The state of Punjab is very safe in India for Christians. There are Sikhs living here—they are also a religious minority in India. We are also a minority, but never before have we had any threats. But unfortunately, this has happened, and we are all shocked about how this is possible. Nobody knows how this can happen.

“Two people came by bike. Every Saturday, the pastor, after finishing his Sunday-service preparations, at p.m., he will come out. As usual, he had been talking with people outside, very casually. Then at , two people came very near, about 2-3 feet, and they shot his leg, and his face and his chest.”

CCTV cameras recorded footage of the attack, but a police spokesman said it was too dark to make out the attackers’ faces. {eoa}

This article originally appeared on World Watch Monitor.