

Two Christians Slain in Attack Outside Church in Pakistan

✖ Two Christians were gunned down and two others are in a serious condition with bullet wounds after Muslim youths attacked them outside a church building in Hyderabad Monday night, witnesses said.

Residents of Hurr Camp, a colony of working-class Christians in Hyderabad in Sindh Province, were reportedly celebrating the 30th anniversary of their Salvation Army church when a group of Muslim youths gathered outside the building and started playing music loudly on their cell phones. They also started teasing Christian women as they arrived for the celebration, according to reports.

Christians Younis Masih, 47, Siddique Masih, 45, Jameel Masih, 22, and a 20-year-old identified as Waseem came out of the church building to stop the Muslim youths from teasing the Christian women, telling them to respect the sanctity of the church. A verbal clash ensued, after which the Muslim youths left, only to return with handguns.

Witnesses told Compass by phone that the Muslim youth opened fire on the Christians, killing Younis Masih and Jameel Masih instantly, and seriously injuring Siddique Masih and Waseem. The injured men have been transferred to a hospital in Karachi, the provincial capital of Sindh.

Younis Masih is survived by his wife and four children, while Jameel Masih was married only a month ago, and his sudden death has put his family into a state of shock.

“My son had gone to the church to attend the anniversary celebrations from our family; a few hours later we were told

about his death," a wailing Surraya Bibi told Compass by telephone from Hyderabad. "I got him married only a month ago. The cold-blooded murderers have destroyed my family, but our most immediate concern is Jameel's wife, who has gone completely silent since the news was broken to her."

She said the local police's indifference towards the brutal incident had exacerbated the Christians' sorrow.

"The police were acting as if it was not a big deal," she said. "They did not register a case until late at night, when all of us blocked the main Hyderabad Expressway along with the two dead bodies for some hours."

Jameel Masih's paternal uncle, Anwar Masih, told Compass that police were biased against the Christians, as "none of the accused has been arrested so far, and they are roaming the area without any fear."

He said police had taken into custody some teenagers who had no involvement in the killings.

"This has been done just to show their senior officials that they are not sitting idle," he said.

Anwar Masih said the families had little hope for justice, because "if we have to dishonor the dead bodies by placing them on the roads to get a case registered, what should we hope for when the investigations begin?"

He said that during their protest, some leaders of the Muttahida Qaumi Movement, a regional political party known for its secular but often violent ideology, arrived and suggested the Christians retaliate against the Muslims.

"We told them that as Christians we are not going to take the law into our hands," Anwar Masih said.

He said that Jameel Masih's father, Sardar Masih, and the other Christians would visit the Baldia Colony police station

Wednesday morning (March 23) to see whether there has been any progress in the investigation.

“Please pray for us,” he said.

Compass made efforts to contact Hyderabad District Police Officer Munir Ahmed Sheikh to ask about progress in the case and whether any of the named suspects have been arrested by police, but the calls were unanswered.

The killing of the two Christians comes a week after another Christian, sentenced to life imprisonment on false blasphemy charges, died in Karachi Central Prison. The family of Qamar David claims he was murdered on March 15, while conflicting reports from the jail suggest that he died of heart failure.

If David died from torture, yesterday’s killings bring the number of Christians murdered in March alone to four, the most prominent among them being Federal Minister for Minority Affairs Shahbaz Bhatti, who was assassinated in Islamabad on March 2 for opposing the country’s controversial blasphemy laws.