



## Easter Bombing by Taliban in Pakistan Targeted Christians

The Easter Sunday attack by a suicide bomber in a park in Lahore, Pakistan, that killed at least 69 people targeted Christians, said a spokesman for the Pakistani Taliban faction that claimed responsibility for the attack.

A Reuters report carried by the *Calgary Sun* newspaper noted that the bomb blast occurred in the parking area of Gulshan-e-Iqbal Park, close to an area with children's swings. The park is a popular recreational spot for members of Lahore's Christian community, many of whom had gone there to enjoy a leisurely Easter afternoon and evening.



"When the blast occurred, the flames were so high they reached above the trees and I saw bodies flying in the air," the report quoted Hasan Imran, a resident who had gone to the park for a walk.

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"The target was Christians," Reuters quoted Ehsanullah Ehsan, a spokesman for the Taliban faction, Jamaat-ul-Ahrar. "We want to send this message to Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif that we have entered Lahore."

"He can do what he wants but he won't be able to stop us. Our suicide bombers will continue these attacks," the Taliban spokesman continued.

CNN reported that Prime Minister Sharif, who was born in Lahore and enjoys strong support there, strongly condemned the attack.

The report from CNN observed that before the blast, some of Lahore's Christians mingled with their Muslim neighbors in the park, taking their children on rides or pushing them on swings.

Suddenly, this peaceful setting was brought to an abrupt end as a blast tore through the park.

CNN observed that because of what it described as an "innocent setting," an unusually high number of the victims were women and children.

Lahore, with an estimated population around seven million, is Pakistan's second-largest city, after Karachi. It is the capital of Punjab province, in the northeastern corner of Pakistan, near the Indian border. It is, therefore, on the opposite side of the country from Pakistan's border with Afghanistan, which the Taliban once controlled. Though it was driven from power by the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan following the September 11, 2001 attacks, it remains an influential force in that country and controls some parts of Afghanistan near the Pakistan border.

That the Taliban have the strength to carry out a terrorist attack so far from their main base of control



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on March 29, 2016

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is indicative of the seriousness of their threat.

In his telephone call acknowledging responsibility for the Lahore bombing, Ehsan said that such attacks would continue until Sharia law is implemented in Pakistan.

The CNN report noted that there has been a history of violence against Christians in Pakistan.

A year ago, suicide bombers attacked a Christian community in Lahore (which also took place on a Sunday) setting off two blasts that killed at least 14 people and wounded dozens more. The Pakistani Taliban claimed responsibility for that attack and warned of more to come.

In September 2013, in another Sunday attack, suicide bombers attacked a Christian church in Peshawar, northwest Pakistan, in a blast that killed 81 people, including choir members and children attending Sunday school.

A splinter group of the Pakistani Taliban claimed responsibility for that church attack, and said it was done in retribution for the U.S. program of drone strikes in tribal areas of Pakistan. "Until and unless drone strikes are stopped, we will continue to strike wherever we will find an opportunity against non-Muslims," said Ahmed Marwat, a spokesman for TTP-Jandullah.

However, the main Pakistani Taliban, which is called Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), declined to accept blame for the attack.

"We refuse to take responsibility for the church blast. This is an attempt to sabotage peace talks between the TTP and the government," said Taliban spokesman Shahidullah Shahid.

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