



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on September 23, 2013

## Scores of Christians Killed in Suicide Attack on Historic Pakistan Church

A duo of suicide bombers struck a historic church in northwestern Pakistan September 22, killing at least 85 Christian worshippers and injuring over 140 others. The attack, considered the deadliest ever against Christians in Pakistan, was carried out on the 130-year-old All Saints Church in the city of Peshawar where some 400 worshipers had just concluded the Sunday service.



The [Associated Press](#) reported that a Pakistani wing of the Taliban claimed responsibility for the attack, and warned that they would continue to target non-Muslims until the United States halted drone strikes in the region. The United States has reportedly carried out hundreds of drone attacks in the region. The suicide attack took place in an area known as a center for terrorist activity, a Pakistani government official said. “[Christians] are the enemies of Islam, therefore we target them,” [Reuters](#) quoted a spokesman for the Taliban group as saying. “We will continue our attacks on non-Muslims on Pakistani land.”

The suicide bombers, strapped with bombs loaded with ball bearings, detonated themselves in the midst of worshippers leaving the church and making their way to the front lawn of the church property for a free meal of rice. Emergency personnel on the scene said the dead included 34 women and seven children, with another 37 children among the wounded. “This is the deadliest attack against Christians in our country,” said Irfan Jamil, a Christian leader based in the eastern city of Lahore.

“There were blasts and there was hell for all of us,” said Nazir John, one of the blast survivors. “When I got my senses back, I found nothing but smoke, dust, blood, and screaming people. I saw severed body parts and blood all around.”

The white walls of the church, which dates from the late 1800s, were pockmarked with deep holes from the ball bearings that were expelled from the bomb packs. Blood stained the floor and the walls, and plates filled with rice were scattered across the church lawn. A police spokesman said the attack was carried out by two suicide bombers who detonated their explosives at the same moment.

Violence against Christians and other non-Muslims has been escalating over the past few months in Pakistan, as it has throughout the Middle East, and the country’s prime minister, Nawaz Sharif, said that it is destroying any efforts toward negotiating some sort of peace with the Pakistani Taliban. “Such



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incidents are not conducive to peace talks,” Sharif said following the attack. “Unfortunately, because of this, the government is unable to move forward on what it had envisaged, on what it had wished for.” Sharif insisted that those behind the attack “have no religion, and targeting innocent people is against the teachings of Islam and all religions.”

The [New York Times](#) reported that Pakistan’s Muslim Ulema Council, the country’s largest clerical body, also condemned the blast, declaring that it was “standing with our Christian brothers in this tragedy.”

Christians and others who have been targeted by the Taliban have been critical of any efforts other than force to stop the terrorists, negating the value of dialogue with the Muslim extremists. “What dialogue are we talking about? Peace with those who are killing innocent people?” wondered Paul Bhatti, head of the All Pakistan Minorities Alliance, whose brother, a government official, was assassinated by terrorists in 2011. “They don’t want dialogue. They don’t want peace.” He added that “our state and our intelligence agencies are so weak that anybody can kill anyone anytime.”

The city of Peshawar contains some 70,000 Christians, and following the attack hundreds took to the streets to protest, burning tires and blocking passage of traffic. “Our people have been killed,” [Fox News](#) quoted one of the protesters as saying. “Nobody seems to bother about us. No one apprehended the killers.”

Another, whose father was killed in the attack, demanded: “What have we done wrong to these people? Why are we being killed?”

One of the Christians wounded in the blast told AFP News that before the attack “we had very good relations with the Muslims; there was no tension before that blast. But we fear that this is the beginning of a wave of violence against the Christians.”

Sarfaz Hemphray, a Christian leader in Peshawar, said that the Christian community would begin a three-day period of mourning for the dead, and challenged the government to step up its efforts to protect churches and Christians in the area. “If the government shows will, it can control this terrorism, he said. “We have been asking authorities to enhance security, but they haven’t paid any heed.”

Christians in Pakistan have been the target of persecution and violence in the past, but the latest bombing was the deadliest. In March, a Muslim mob attacked a Christian neighborhood in Lahore, burning two churches and more than 100 houses. Similarly, in 2009, 40 houses and a church were set on fire by a mob of some 1,000 Muslims in a village in Pakistan’s Punjab province. At least seven Christians were killed in that attack. And in 2001, 17 Christians were killed in an attack on a church in the city of Bahawalpur in Punjab province.

Tahir Naveed Chaudhry, a Christian lawyer and chairman of the Pakistan Minorities Alliance, said after the blast that “every Christian is feeling under siege in Pakistan.” [International Christian Concern](#) (ICC), which has monitored persecution against Christians in Pakistan over the past several years, recalled that last year “Chaudhry successfully defended a young Christian girl from charges of blasphemy after a Muslim cleric accused her of burning the Koran. The girl fled to Canada with her parents in March. That same month, hundreds of Christians were forced to flee their neighborhood in the eastern city of Lahore after a mob set fire to dozens of houses while accusing a man of blasphemy.”

William Stark, an ICC Africa spokesman, noted that “Christians continue to be treated like an unwanted religious minority in Pakistan.... False blasphemy accusations are disproportionately targeted at Christians who are often awarded lengthy prison or death sentences where little evidence has been



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offered against them in a court of law.” He warned that “unless and until Pakistan starts taking decisive action to protect its Christian population, deadly attacks like this most recent bombing will continue.”

*Photo of Pakistani Christian women mourning over the coffins of deceased loved ones after Monday's bombing: AP Images*



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