

Expression of concern following the shooting and killing of two Christians in Pakistan

Letter sent by the WCC general secretary to President Asif Ali Zardari and Prime Minister Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani

Geneva, 23 July 2010

Your Excellency,

It is with great dismay that we received news that two young Christians, Pastor Rashid Emmanuel and his brother Sajid Emmanuel, were shot dead by religious extremists in broad daylight in front of a district court compound in Faisalabad on 19 July.

We understand that the two brothers were arrested by police on the accusation made by a complainant alleging that they produced a handwritten leaflet which was defiling Prophet Mohammad. Reports said that police had brought the accused to a court of law to obtain their remand and as the police and brothers were about to leave the court compound they were attacked by a group of gunmen.

Your Excellency, the World Council of Churches (WCC) has expressed in the past its concern about the Blasphemy Law in Pakistan, and we do so again in indicating that the introduction of Blasphemy Law in the Pakistan Penal Code touches upon some of the more sensitive aspects of civil and religious liberty. The Law is also fraught with danger that can be abused by extremist groups when dealing with religious minorities. It has been proven in the past that the charges of Blasphemy law appear to be arbitrarily applied and at times founded on malicious accusations against individuals and groups.

The WCC has expressed its concern in the past and many others stated the same that the introduction of Blasphemy Law in Pakistan is inimical to and destructive of the harmony and well-being of people who live together in a religiously plural society. The misuse of the Blasphemy Law in Pakistan has led to physical violence, damage, destruction of properties and loss of life within the innocent Christian minority over the years. This is a violation of the fundamental rights guaranteed by Article 36 of the Constitution of Pakistan.

Your Excellency, we appeal to you to ensure immediate and necessary actions to bring to justice those who are responsible for the killing of Pastor Rashid Emmanuel and his brother Sajid Emmanuel. We also urge Your Excellency to initiate measures

towards the repeal of the Blasphemy Laws and to secure the rights and dignity of all individuals in Pakistan society.

Respectfully yours,

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General secretary
World Council of Churches