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SBTS student denounces attacks on Christians in Pakistan homeland

By CHIP HUTCHESON, Kentucky Today
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LOUISVILLE, Ky. (KT) — Pakistan is approximately 7,500 miles from Kentucky — but attacks on Christians and churches in eastern Pakistan this week have drawn strong rebuke from a Louisville man.

Sajid Sandhu is a student at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and a member of West Broadway Baptist Church, but he also serves as chairman of Pakistan Interfaith League (PIL) and returned recently from a trip to his homeland where he worked to oppose persecution against Christians in that Muslim-dominated country.

Speaking about the rampage against Christians and churches that occurred Wednesday, Sandhu said he “vehemently denounces the savage and merciless assault on churches in Jaranwala, located within the Faisalabad District.” He has characterized “this inhumane act as an



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affront to Pakistan's sovereignty, designed to destabilize the nation and cast a negative light on its peace-loving populace.”

The violence erupted over allegations that a Christian man had desecrated the Quran. The man's house was demolished, churches were burned, and several homes were damaged, police and Pakistani Christians said.

The scale of the violence prompted the government to deploy additional police forces and send in the army to help restore order.

Police chief Rizwan Khan said Muslims living in the area claimed they had seen a local Christian, Raja Amir, and a friend tearing out pages from a Quran, throwing them on the ground and writing insulting remarks on other pages, angering Muslims. A mob gathered and began attacking multiple churches and several Christian homes, burning furniture and other household items. Some members of the Christian community fled their homes to escape the mob.

Police eventually intervened, firing into the air and wielding batons before dispersing the attackers with the help of Muslim clerics and elders.

Videos and photos posted on social media show an angry mob descending upon a church, throwing pieces of bricks and burning it. In another video, two other churches are attacked, their windows broken as attackers throw furniture out and set it on fire.

Several policemen are seen in the videos watching the situation without intervening to stop the vandalism.

In yet another video, a man is seen climbing to the roof of the church and removing the steel cross after repeatedly hitting it with a hammer as the crowd down on the road cheered him on.

“We were sitting at home when suddenly we heard that a mob is coming and it is burning homes and attacking churches,” Shazia Amjad told the Associated Press as she wept outside her torched home.

She said the mob burned household items and furniture and some of her possessions were stolen while she was staying with her family in a safer area.

Amjad said the rioters used gasoline to burn homes. Other Christians described similar ordeals and expressed bewilderment.

Azeem Masih wept as he sat outside his burned home on a street where several buildings were burned.

He said some of the rioters brought vehicles to take the Christians' household items after burning their furniture and other belongings.

“Why did they do it to us? We had not done anything wrong,” he said.

Christians consoled each other outside their damaged homes, weeping and crying as those who lost their homes wondered where to go and what to do.

In an address directed at the government Pakistan government, Sandhu issued a demand for swift apprehension of the perpetrators and their subsequent punishment as a deterrent, aiming to discourage any future attacks on religious minorities. He stressed that it is the government's duty to ensure the safety of religious minority groups within Pakistan. “Regrettably, a succession of heinous incidents has led to a pervasive lack of faith among these communities in the government's efficacy, as well as in the various political parties presently in power,” he said.

Sandhu said he and the members of the PIL “stand united against those hostile to Pakistan's well-being.” He noted that the “entire nation is united in grief over this gruesome event, extending heartfelt sympathy to their Christian compatriots during this somber period.”

The Associated Press reported Thursday 129 Muslims had been arrested in connected with the attacks on a dozen churches and nearly two dozen homes of minority Christians. Also, Amir and his friend were arrested based on allegations that they defaced the Quran.

In a missions emphasis at West Broadway last Sunday, Sandhu issued several prayer points for Pakistan:

- Pray for the minds of church leadership in Pakistan to be enlightened with the true message of the Bible and that they may become true Christian role models.
- Pray for Christians in Pakistan who have lived in poverty, illiteracy and homelessness for many generations — that they may be set free by God from all man-made captivities.
- Pray for the lawmakers and those in power to be guided by the Holy Spirit to implement the Constitution of Pakistan in its true letter and spirit and abolish the discriminatory laws that stand in the way of justice and equal rights for religious minorities.
- Pray for the persecuted church in Pakistan that God will protect Christians from religious extremists.
- Pray for the team of the National Baptist Church of Pakistan and its endeavors and for God to protect, guide and enable them to reach the unreached and win souls for Christ.

Chip Hutcheson

Content editor