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## PAKISTAN | Third Attack on Christians in Five Months

Two Christian men were killed and three injured April 15 after unknown gunmen opened fire on the Christian neighborhood of Essa Nagri in Quetta, Balochistan Province.

As worshippers were leaving a church service in Essa Nagri, four unidentified assailants on two motorbikes entered the area and started shooting indiscriminately at people near the church. Two Christian men, Rashid Khalid and Azhar Iqbal, died on the way to the hospital. Three other Christians sustained injuries.

This incident is the third attack against the Christian community in the last five months. On April 2, four Christian family members from Punjab province, who were travelling by rickshaw to visit relatives in Quetta to celebrate Easter, were gunned down by men on motorbikes. Daesh (Islamic State, IS) claimed responsibility for the killings. Prior to this, on Dec. 17, 2017, two suicide bombers carried out an assault on the Bethel Memorial Methodist Church while the Sunday service was taking place, killing at least nine people and injuring over 56 others.

Pakistan's Christians face numerous severe violations of freedom of religion or belief, including large-scale targeted attacks such as the suicide bombing that took place at the Gulshan-e-Iqbal Park in Lahore on March 27, 2016, aimed at families celebrating Easter. Over 72 people were killed and over 300 were injured.

Attacks on the Christian community in Quetta are relatively recent. The Shi'a Hazara community, who reside predominantly in Quetta, are subject to ongoing sectarian violence. As a result of a sustained campaign of targeted killings, suicide attacks and bombings, hundreds of Shi'a Hazara have been killed in the last five years. The murder of a shopkeeper from the Shia Hazara community April 18 was the fourth attack in recent months to target Hazaras.

"We extend our heartfelt condolences to the families of Rashid Khalid and Azhar Iqbal and continue to pray for those people who were injured. CSW urges the government and law enforcement authorities of Pakistan to implement measures proposed in the National Action Plan, to take effective steps against the persecution of religious minorities and to disband the activities of militant groups that are operating within the country," Mervyn Thomas, Chief Executive of Christian Solidarity Worldwide, said. "Lack of effective state action continues to contribute to the environment of impunity in which attacks against religious minorities take place

and go unpunished. Longer term, the Pakistani government should enact the directives within the Supreme Court's judgement of June 19, 2014, including establishing a special task force to protect places of worship and a national council to safeguard the rights of minorities.”