

Pakistani churches condemn killings at World Vision office

Anto Akkara | Mar. 12, 2010



Students light candles during a march to promote peace and condemn terrorism in Lahore, Pakistan, Dec. 12. (CNS)

BANGALORE, India -- Churches in Pakistan have deplored the killing of six World Vision staff members as the international Christian humanitarian organization suspended its operations in the country.

"All of World Vision's operations in the country have been suspended for the time being," agency spokesman Dean Owen said after the attack, adding that the aid group had received "no threatening letters" before the killing.

Owen told Mission Network News that "somewhere between 15 and 20" militants stormed the compound and "shot up the staff and robbed the staff of jewelry, money, computers, and phones.

"World Vision typically loses one staff member a year to violence; never, ever in our 60-year history have we lost six in one day."

News reports said unidentified gunmen lined up the staff in the small town of Ogi on Wednesday (March 10) and shot them indiscriminately before detonating bombs that damaged the building. The facility was intended to assist those affected by the earthquake that ravaged the area in 2005.

In addition to the six deaths, eight staff members were injured.

"This kind of barbarous act is against the suffering humanity," the National Council of Churches in Pakistan (NCCP) said in a statement.

World Vision had been operating relief centers in the troubled North West Frontier Province after the 2005 earthquake killed an estimated 100,000 people and destroyed local infrastructure.

"All the people who were killed belong to (the) Islamic faith," said the national church council, an umbrella group of four Protestant churches in the Muslim majority nation.

Victor Azariah, the NCCP's general secretary, told Ecumenical News International that the attack seemed to be

linked to the "Taliban movement, which is against the American presence in any shape."

World Vision president Rich Stearns, in a statement, said in a statement he mourns "the terrible loss to the World Vision family" in the "brutal and senseless attack."

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