

Pakistan's security situation means high costs for Catholic schools

PESHAWAR, Pakistan – Catholic education administrators in Pakistan's Punjab province say their schools face huge additional security costs as the security situation in the country deteriorates.

Under provincial government guidelines in the wake of recent terror attacks, schools must provide eight-foot boundary walls, surveillance cameras, metal detectors and scanners, a barbed wire perimeter, and at least two armed guards, reported the Asian church news agency UCA News.

"The government is providing security arrangements for its own schools. The private and church-run schools have to bear these additional expenses," Dominican Sister Parveen Rahmat, principal of Sacred Heart Cathedral High School in Lahore, told UCA News.

Police are reviewing security measures in educational institutions in Punjab province and shutting down any school or college that does not meet the guidelines.

"We are trying to meet the requirements but this is not our work," Sister Rahmat said.

The government ordered all educational institutions nationwide to close in the wake of suicide bombings at the International Islamic University in the capital Islamabad Oct. 20. Three female students were among six people killed in the blasts.

Schools reopened in three provinces in late October, but in North West Frontier province, where there have been three recent bombings, they remained closed indefinitely.

Most church-run schools in Punjab province were closed for two weeks.

"Parents are worried for the safety of their children. Formation of children is not possible unless (the) government ensures a safe environment," Sister Rahmat said.

Archbishop Lawrence Saldanha of Lahore agreed.

“It is a pity that terrorists are targeting schools. The collapsed government has put the huge task of security measures on us. The situation is out of their hands,” he said.

The Catholic Church has more than 90 educational institutes in North West Frontier province. Protestant churches run 17.

The situation in Peshawar remained tense after three bomb attacks, including an Oct. 28 car bombing in which 105 died and 200 were injured.