

PAKISTAN: Pakistan bans 11 Christian TV channels in 'sweeping attack on religious freedom'

Pakistan has banned Christian television channels in the country, for the first time in 17 years.

India Today (13.10.2016) – <http://bit.ly/2ekmpZX> – Pakistan has banned 11 Christian television channels, after the country's TV regulatory body declared them illegal in September.

The move has left the country's 2.8 million christian residents with no public media presence, according to a report in express.co.uk. have called the move a blow to religious freedom.

The Pakistani Media Regulatory Authority had in its order accused the stations of being "illegal" and "not having permission" to broadcast.

Local priests and various members of the local Christian community are calling the move an "act of intimidation" and an "attack to religious freedom". They have appealed to the government to revoke the measure.

"As citizens, Christians have the right to practice their religion, but if they block you, it means not all citizens are equal. When someone bans the expression of faith, which is a fundamental right, there is persecution," Father Morris Jalal, founder of Catholic TV, told the newspaper.

Catholic TV was broadcasted from Lahore, where 72 people – including 30 children – were killed in a suicide blast while

celebrating Easter last March. Pro-Christian channels had been allowed to broadcast for 17 years until now.

Most pro-Christian channels in Pakistan, are based abroad since because PEMRA does not release licenses for religious broadcasting. It allows the airing of Christian messages only for Christmas and Easter.

Certain programmers, meanwhile, don't want to protest against the authorities' decision at all. One of them is Saleem Iqbal, director of Isaac TV which was the first Pakistani Christian satellite broadcaster.

"We look at it like it is, we do not have the license. We can only ask people to continue to watch us online. Many people are passionate about our channel, which is broadcast from Hong Kong. A ban on cable transmission will not stop us," he told AsiaNews.it.

The move comes on the heels of a 16-year-old Christian boy facing the death penalty under Pakistan's strict blasphemy laws. He was accused of insulting Islam in a Facebook post, which allegedly showed a photo of the Kaaba in Mecca with a pig's head on top.

It is unclear if the teenager posted the image, 'liked' it or was simply tagged in the post.