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ASIA/PAKISTAN - Emotional outpour and protests among Christians following brutal murder of Catholic girl

Lahore (Agenzia Fides) – Profound emotion, anger, and protests have been taking place among Christians in Pakistan after the murder of a Catholic girl, 12-year-old Shazia Bashir, who was tortured, raped, and killed by her employer, a wealthy Muslim lawyer in Lahore. As Agenzia Fides has learned from the Church in Pakistan, the girl was from a very poor Catholic family and had worked for eight months as a maid at the home of prominent lawyer in Lahore, named Chaudhry Muhammad Neem. The girl was beaten, raped, and murdered on January 22. As a local source told Fides, the girl's funeral, held today in Lahore, was attended by a crowd of thousands, visibly moved by the event. The funeral was also attended by Bishops of all the Christian denominations, who have launched messages of solidarity and urged the faithful to pray. Many Christians were in tears, and even many Muslims showed affection and solidarity.
This is one of many incidents of torture and mistreatment that Christians suffer, especially poorer ones, when they are employed as workers (for often very humble services) in the homes of Muslims.
Shazia was working for 1,000 rupees a month (about 12 U.S. dollars) to procure a livelihood for her family: her parents, two married sisters, and an 8-year-old brother.
The girl's parents have said that for days they were forbidden to see their daughter. After asking several times, they found her in serious conditions, with obvious signs of violence and torture. They immediately took her to Jinnah Hospital in Lahore, where Shazia died.
The lawyer tried to buy their silence by offering 20,000 rupees (around $ 250), but the parents refused and reported the story.
Police resisted and at first did not want to record what had happened, but protests of Christians brought the case to public attention. On January 23, a crowd gathered in front of the palace of the Regional Parliament of Punjab (of which Lahore is the capital), demanding justice. Only after over 18 hours, did the police finally register the case. Six people were arrested after the intervention of the Federal Government yesterday, January 24. The President of Pakistan, Ali Zardari, immediately allocated 500,000 rupees ($6,000) in “compensation” to the family of Shazia. The Minister for Minority Affairs, Shahbaz Bhatti, has assured that "those guilty will be brought to justice." (PA) (Agenzia Fides 25/01/2010)

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