



ASIA/PAKISTAN - Faithful in prayer for victims of World Vision attack

Lahore (Agenzia Fides) - The flow of the faithful is constant. At the National Shrine of Lahore, the Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, Christian pilgrims from all denominations come to pray, leave flowers, express empathy and solidarity with the six victims of the recent attack on the Christian NGO "World Vision," which worked in Pakistan on providing educational programs and development assistance to children.

Yesterday, March 10, a group of armed men (probably Taliban) attacked the NGO's offices in the District of Mansehra, the Northwest Frontier Province with bombs and armed force, killing 6 workers and wounding at least another seven.

The terrorist action has led to dismay and sadness in the Christian community in Pakistan, mainly because "the efforts of NGOs like World Vision helps to improve social and economic situations of the population without any discrimination among beneficiaries and without any form of proselytism," says a source of Fides in the Church of Pakistan.

The Shrine of the Sacred Heart in Lahore is a point of reference for the faithful in Pakistan and also a place which, as Rector Fr. Andrew Nisar tells Fides, "in Lent is a pilgrimage site and is known for its charitable works supported by the faithful, such as the orphanage 'House of Love' in Lahore, run by the Missionaries of Charity, and others."

Today and in coming days, there will be continued prayer dedicated to the victims of terrorism, and a campaign of solidarity with the families of the six Pakistani World Vision workers who died yesterday.

Life becomes difficult for non-governmental organizations and associations within the Pakistani civil society, defending the rights and freedoms of religious minorities. Many NGOs, whether they are Christian-based or not feel insecure, fearful of becoming a target of extremists.

The NGOs point out that 2009 was a "black year" for Christians in Pakistan: more than 130 Christians have died because of attacks, arrests, beatings, and torture. And 2010, with its recent episodes, does not promise to be much better. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 11/3/2010)