



ASIA/INDIA - Over 1,000 incidents of anti-Christian violence in 2 years; latest situation in Karnataka worse than Orissa

Bangalore (Agenzia Fides) – Today, March 15, the police went to the Cathedral of Karwar (coastal town in Karnataka) and warned the Vicar General to stop spreading Christian literature and Christian religious pictures because "it offends Hindus." This is just one of the latest examples of the incidents that have been reported to Fides, that show the considerable deterioration of respect for human rights and religious freedom in the Indian state of Karnataka, in southwest India.

Other recent episodes have reached Fides from the local Christian communities: March 8, a Protestant pastor was beaten and injured in Mysore by Hindu activists who brutally interrupted a prayer meeting he was leading. Also in Karwar, in late February, some Hindu radicals blamed local Christians of "forced conversions," striking them in public and leaving them unconscious in the street.

"Anti-Christian attacks, incidents of persecution, and obvious discrimination take place on a daily basis, amidst the silence of the authorities and the general public," Fides is told by Joe Dias, a lay Catholic and leader of the Catholic Secular Forum, the Indian non-governmental organization that works to defend and promote the rights of Christians, publicly supported by Cardinal Oswald Gracias, Archbishop of Mumbai.

"The attacks are carried out by Hindu militant organizations in the area, with political cover for such attacks being guaranteed by the government of the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party), the Hindu nationalist party which has been in power in Karnataka for two years," said Joe Dias.

The assessment for this two-year period has been bleak for Christians. "We have documented more than 1,000 anti-Christian incidents in this period. It is unacceptable. The picture that emerges is worse than what happened in Orissa, because there there's been an uprising of public opinion, the outrage of the international community, and the intervention of the federal government. In Karnataka, however, thanks to the underground coverage of the BJP and the state police, there is no cultural or emotional impact on the population. Often there are no official complaints (which the police refuse to record), and there are no articles or reports from the mass media. Everything happens in silence, indifference, and impunity, but the Christian community is obviously suffering," Joe Dias tells Fides.

The Catholic activist "calls for the official intervention of the Indian Bishops' Conference, to report these abuses and the situation," and "an urgent decision from the Central Government of the Indian Union to dismiss the nationalist government of Karnataka, which is unable to guarantee and protect the rights of all citizens." (PA) (Agenzia Fides 15/3/2010)