



## **ASIA/PAKISTAN - Three volunteers killed were Americans from one of the 1,500 foreign NGOs**

Islamabad (Agenzia Fides) – The three aid workers killed in the Swat Valley between August 24 and 25 by an attack waged by Islamic fundamentalist groups (see Fides 27 and 28/8/2010) are American citizens local sources of Fides say. The name of the organization they worked for in Pakistan, engaged in flood relief for refugees, is still unknown for security reasons. However, according to some sources, the Pakistani government will soon provide details about the incident.

The fact is, says a Fides source in a Pakistani NGO, that "they do not want to create panic in the world of humanitarian organizations and among donors, especially during this time of international mobilization for aid that is taking place, after the initial stalemate..."

According to data collected by Fides in Pakistan, there are about 1,500 NGOs and foreign associations in the area engaged in humanitarian assistance, while before the flood there were only about 200. "The episode of the brutal execution of three volunteers risks turning away relief workers and reversing the trend of donors," notes the source. "This is why the Pakistani government and army are keeping the matter in strict confidence."

The spokesman for the United Nations office in Pakistan, Maurizio Giuliano, told Fides that "research is under way: for now we can neither confirm nor deny this news. We continue to work to save millions of people." He also explained that the 29 NGOs, of which 10 are Pakistani and 19 are foreign, are working in partnership with the UN office in Pakistan for emergency aid. Caritas and other NGOs also say that they will continue to work to provide relief, albeit with "with necessary precaution."

Other volunteers injured in the attack, local sources inform Fides, were transferred to military hospitals in the area of Mingora, protecting them from contact with the outside. The military hospital system in Pakistan is renowned for high standards of technology, professionalism, and competence.

Fides sources in the world of Pakistani NGOs indicate that those likely responsible for the massacre are local jihadist groups linked to the network of "Tehreek-e-Shariat-e-Nafaz-e-Mohammadi" (TNSM), a Pakistani militant organization with Wahhabiti ties, declared a terrorist group and outlawed by the government in 2002. They are very active in the Swat Valley, but also in the districts of Dir and Malakand, in the North West Frontier Province. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 30/08/2010)