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ASIA/PAKISTAN - Discrimination in aid: incidents and testimonies

Islamabad (Agenzia Fides) – There have been a long list of cases reported to Fides on discrimination against Christians, religious minorities, Dalits, the poorest of the poor in humanitarian aid distribution. "The general framework of social and religious discrimination in Pakistan becomes more despicable at this stage and pollutes solidarity," notes a source of Fides. There is growing anger among the refugees and this past Thursday, in the city of Hyderabad, many participated in a protest march for the mistreatment of religious minorities.
Humanitarian agencies and NGOs working in Pakistan have told Fides that in the Thatta district, heavily flooded in recent days, many Christian families have been denied aid, even from government officials.
Zubair Masih said: "I have come from Sukkur. We were overcome by waters and we lost everything. We went to a refugee camp near Thatta, but they did not allow us to enter because we are Christians."
Abid Masih, a Christian who lives in a camp near Larkana, said: "My wife is sick, but the doctor refused to visit her and treat her, saying that we should wait for the World Health Organization to send Christian doctors. Aamir Gill, among the refugees from Dadu, says: "I arrived with my family at a camp near Hyderabad, but the camp administration refused to register us because we are Christians and they did not give us anything. We were forced to leave."
Carl Moeller, President of the American organization Open Doors, which publishes a report on persecuted Christians around the world, in a statement sent to Fides says: "Some Christian refugees are openly denied aid, while others are told to leave or convert to Islam. You can imagine that terrible choice: either you abandon your faith or you cannot feed your child."
The Ahmadi, considered by the official Islam as "heretics," are also suffering discrimination: "The government and local Islamic leaders have denied tents and aid to over 500 families of the Ahmadi community in Southern Punjab. In other areas where the Ahmadi community lives, such as the Districts of Muzaffargarh, Dera Ghazi Khan, and Rajanpur (Punjab), were completely excluded from the distribution of humanitarian aid," reads a note sent to Fides by local aid workers.
There is also great suffering, says another NGO, endured by the population of Dalits (so-called outcasts) of Pakistan, the lowest on the social totem pole. "The Dalit families in Sindh suffer doubly: for the displacement and for exclusion from aid distribution. They are driven from the refugee camps and mistreated." (PA) (Agenzia Fides 04/09/2010)

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