



ASIA/PAKISTAN - Church bombing in the northwest, 2 Christians wounded

Peshawar (Agenzia Fides) – There is alarm in the Christian community of Peshawar, provincial capital of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (formerly known as the Northwest Frontier Province) in northwestern Pakistan. Yesterday evening, between 8 and 9 pm, St. Paul Lutheran Church in the city of Mardan, located in this province, was hit by an explosion that caused two wounded. Both are in the hospital, one of them in rather serious conditions. One of them was the warden of the church. The bomb was placed near the entrance of the building, causing damages to it. According to local sources of Fides, had it exploded during the day, there would have been many victims. The Church of St. Paul is located in the downtown area of the city, site of businesses, traffic, people at work, etc. This morning, the police already arrested some suspects. Fides sources in the Christian community say "it is an act of intimidation towards Christians and their activities. Panic has spread in the community." The building belongs to the "Church of Pakistan," a union of four Protestant Christian denominations: Lutheran, Methodist, Anglican, and Presbyterian.

The Church of Pakistan in Peshawar has responded promptly to the emergency flood relief effort and is assisting more than 1,300 displaced families, especially Christians and Hindus, but also Muslims. Many Christian families have been accepted in the Church of Saint Mary in Risalpur and the Church of Christ in Nowshera, and the Christian volunteers are trying to reach people who are in remote areas, still without aid. "Their work is despised by the Taliban groups who do not accept interference," said a Fides source.

"This is just another act of terrorist violence by Taliban groups who wish to dictate and assert their power in this province," Ghulam Dastagir, coordinator of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, told Fides. "They continue attacks on religious minorities such as Ahmadis, Sikh, and Christians as well as against Shiite Muslims. The local government of the Province of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa seems unable to provide protection and security," he added.

Terrorism also presents a difficulty to humanitarian aid workers: "Such events create more logistical problems for us, especially when it comes to reaching remote areas. Our group continues its activities in the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province, despite the high risks," Farruk Marwin Parvez, Regional Manager of the Christian NGO Church World Service, told Fides.

"Christians in Pakistan are the victims in these attacks. We should mention that those who organize them are only small groups of extremists working against peace and harmony. In this difficult moment for the country, we are seeing many examples of solidarity, friendship, and mutual aid, which give us hope," said Parvez. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 13/9/2010)