



ASIA/PAKISTAN - Christians and Muslims confirm discriminations in aid distribution

Hyderabad (Agenzia Fides) - "The situation is terrible for everyone. However, we continue to see and receive news on discrimination in the management of humanitarian aid, at the expense of Hindus and Christians from lower social classes: the poor are in rural areas, people have generally looked down upon, which today are not even considered worthy of concern," Fides was told by Fr. Robert McCulloch, a Missionary of St. Columban in Hyderabad, in Sindh. In the province, given the rain and the flooding of Lake Manchhar, there are now more heavy floods in the districts of Dadu and Jamshoro, causing the displacement of people from at least 25 villages. There are also many Christian and Hindu minorities in the area.

Confirmations of this discrimination have also come from Muslim representatives of civil society in Pakistan: Junaid Khanzada, Muslim intellectual and journalist, former president of the Press Association in Hyderabad, told Fides that "some government officials and Islamic fundamentalist organizations deliberately ignore the needs of the tribal Sindh. They are Christians and Hindus of the lower social classes; in Pakistan, they are classified as belonging to "scheduled castes," in India called dalit." According to Khanzada, "in many cases religion, rather than the actual needs, has become the criterion for giving aid."

Ishaq Pangrati, a Muslim intellectual of Hyderabad, a member of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan," a Pakistani NGO, told Fides: "I am shocked and alarmed by the discrimination in the distribution of food to refugees, which I have seen with my own eyes in the Jati area, strongly affected by the floods." Jati is a town in the district of Tahtta, in Sindh, already reported by Fides as being among the places inhabited by religious minorities who have suffered from "diverted floods."

James Francis, a Catholic, Administrator of St. Elizabeth Hospital in Hyderabad, leads a team of doctors and nurses, both Christian and Muslim, who visit 2 or 3 camps or settlements of IDPs every day in the districts surrounding the city. The team - which includes a female doctor for assistance to women - brings medicine, visits the sick, and gives medical care to the displaced. Francis said in an interview with Fides: "Every day we see the discrimination and segregation of the displaced. The camps are strictly separated and those of Hindu and Christian religious minorities, people of lower social classes, are clearly penalized. Urgent measures should be taken to end these injustices." (PA) (Agenzia Fides 09/15/2010)