



## **ASIA/PAKISTAN - Bishops: "We thank the Pope for his attention towards the sufferings of Christians"**

Multan (Agenzia Fides) - "We are very grateful to the Holy Father for his words in support of Asia Bibi, for his attention towards the sufferings of Christians in Pakistan and our rights. On behalf of the bishops, and the entire community of believers in Christ, we express our sincere thanks for his great courage, for the protection of the voiceless, those who are innocent victims of violence and abuse." These are the recent words spoken, in an interview with Fides, by Bishop Andrew Francis, Bishop of Multan, in Punjab, following the appeal made by Benedict XVI at the end of his General Audience today, in favor of Asia Bibi, a woman sentenced to death for blasphemy.

The Pontiff said: "I express my closeness to Asia Bibi and her family and ask that her freedom be restored as soon as possible," affirming that "the international community is following with great concern the plight of Christians in Pakistan, who are often victims of violence or discrimination." "I pray - he concluded - for those who are in similar situations, that their human dignity and their fundamental rights are fully respected."

In recent days, Bishop Bernard Shaw, Auxiliary Bishop of Lahore, sent an urgent appeal to the Holy Father to intercede for the fate of the woman (see Fides 12/11/2010).

Bishop Francis has told Fides that there will be "a prayer campaign held in all churches, for the life of Asia Bibi. The faithful will gather in Adoration before the Blessed Sacrament and pray for her release, entrusting her suffering to the Lord."

"Asia Bibi's case is very sad. We are really outraged and shocked by the continuous abuse of the law on blasphemy. Asia is the mother of four children, one of whom is disabled. It is a great injustice and suffering to inflict on this family," he said.

The bishop recalls having translated the document "Dominus Iesus" into Urdu and distributing it to many Muslims. "In that text, the then Cardinal Ratzinger, reaffirming the importance of freedom of conscience and faith, encouraged us to promote it in Pakistani society. In this our commitment, the words of the Pope and his fatherly protection encourage and support us." (PA) (Agenzia Fides 17/11/2010)