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ASIA/PAKISTAN - No justice for Shazia Bashir, the Christian girl raped and murdered

Lahore (Fides Service) – There is outrage and disappointment in the Christian community in Pakistan. Chaudhry Naeem, the rich Muslim lawyer accused of raping and killing Shazia Bashir, a 12 year old Christian girl killed in January 2010, was acquitted. The case made headlines internationally and has become the symbol of the violence against Christian girls in Pakistan (see Fides 25/1/2010, 8/2/2010).

Naeem, accused along with his wife, Ghzala, and his son, Haris, was acquitted for lack of evidence by the District Court in Lahore. The family was accused of having forced the girl to work as a maid in their house, seizing her and using violence. According to the defense, the verdict of acquittal came after the prosecution could not prove with medical evidence that the girl was raped and killed. The medical report submitted to the Court states that Shazia died a “natural death”, due to a “skin disease”. The testimonial evidence of Shazia's mother and her siblings were not deemed sufficient by the Court.

According to sources of Fides, the process and the tests were skillfully manipulated to exonerate the family of rich bourgeois Muslims. “For the family of Shazia justice has not been done. It is not the first time that, in cases like this, the outcome of the process leaves influential Muslim citizens unpunished, despite the atrocities committed on poor and helpless Christians,” revealed Nasir Saeed, head of the Centre for Legal Aid Assistance and Settlement”, told Fides. The Centre has offices in London and Lahore, which offers free legal assistance to Christians in Pakistan. The lawyers and Christian organizations with an interest in the matter told Fides there will be an appeal.

Peter Jacob, Executive Secretary of the Justice and Peace Commission for the Bishops of Pakistan commented to Fides: “It is disgusting. This verdict demonstrates that some characters are 'above the law'. These judgments guarantee impunity; because of this, phenomena such as human rights abuses, child labor, and violence against women will continue to flourish. So the work of organizations like ours, committed to the protection of human rights, becomes more difficult. The verdict further demonstrates the inefficiency and lack of independence of the courts and is proof of how you can drive justice.” (PA) (Agenzia Fides 27/11/2010)

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