



## **ASIA/PAKISTAN - Terrorist groups raise aim: "Eliminate Minister Bhatti"**

Islamabad (Agenzia Fides) - The Islamic terrorist organization "Lashkar-e-Toiba", one of the largest in Southern Asia, and other Taliban groups have launched a type of "fatwa" (an official proclamation) against the Minister for Religious Minorities, the Catholic Shabaz Bhatti. Reliable sources in Pakistan inform Fides that the minister is now being targeted by militants. He has become a "legitimate objective" and "may be killed for being an accomplice to the blasphemy." The proclamation is motivated by Bhatti's commitment to the revision of the blasphemy law.

The Minister had already received warnings and threats. The radical organization "Majlis Ahrar-e-Islam", in recent days had told him to "keep your mouth shut and do not criticize the blasphemy law." Months ago, the religious leader Ahmed Mian Hammadi had accused him of blasphemy and threatened him with "decapitation". The position of the Minister in the case of Asia Bibi and his real effort to carry through a draft revision of the law have generated, in a growing climate of intolerance, the new "fatwa" by Taliban terrorist groups.

Mehdi Hasan, President of the "Commission for Human Rights in Pakistan" commented to Fides: "We condemn these irresponsible claims by extremist groups and express solidarity with Minister Bhatti. We are in a situation of increasing polarization and intolerance. But some political parties are trying to exploit the support of Islamic militant groups. It is the government's responsibility to stop terrorists, but even the government is under pressure."

"The social situation is taking a turn for the worse and tension is growing. Pressure from fundamentalist groups becomes stronger and manifestations follow one after another. We are concerned about possible violence on Christian leaders and places of worship," says a Fides source in the Christian community.

Radical Islamic groups protested yesterday in Quetta and Lahore, asking for "namus-e-risalaat" (respect for the Prophet). Preacher Yousaf Qureshi, from the Masjid Mohabaat Khan Mosque in Peshawar, has offered a prize of 500 thousand rupees for the scalp of Asia Bibi, defying the Government to make any move to amend the blasphemy laws. Tomorrow, 5 December 5, another demonstration will take place in Islamabad to put pressure on the political and judicial institutions. On 6 December, the Lahore High Court should rule on the petition that would prevent the President from granting a pardon, and announce the date of the first hearing for the appeal process of Asia Bibi.

Meanwhile, work on selection proceeds for the Commission, that, appointed by President Zardari and under the leadership of Minister Bhatti, will study appropriate amendments to the blasphemy law. The Commission will include political leaders, Muslim clerics and scholars, and representatives of civil society and will draft a proposal for revisions in order to prevent abuses. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 04/12/2010)