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ASIA/PAKISTAN - Minister Bhatti tells Fides: "My commitment to justice goes on"

Islamabad (Agenzia Fides) - The Minister for Minorities, Shabhaz Bhatti, is not discouraged nor impressed by new threats by terrorist groups: "My mission for justice, human rights and the protection of minorities will continue. I trust in God's help," he said in an exclusive interview with Fides.

Minister, have you heard the new threats made against you by terrorist groups?

Threats and intimidation follow one after the other. I take them all seriously, however, my life mission is to protect religious freedom, minority rights, justice and equality. I will continue to do so without hesitation. My commitment will continue in spite of the claims of these groups, which, among other things, are illegal and damaging the country's image.

Now that you are leading an armoured life, how do you feel?

Unfortunately, those who, like me, are committed in this area end up being targeted by extremists. Many have paid with their lives. More than in bodyguards I believe in God's protection. I believe in his help and trust in Providence.

How will the Government of Pakistan react to the growing threats?

The Government and the President of Pakistan will not allow terrorism to flourish and to influence the life of the Country, society, the rule of law, and stability. President Zardari has shown great care and sensitivity to minority issues and, despite the pressures, has expressed the clear intention to revise the law on blasphemy.

Do you believe that the case of Asia Bibi will be influenced by pressure from radical groups?

I do not think that will happen. The institutions will not be intimidated. Justice, law and liberty are not in the hands of radical groups.

How is the case of Asia Bibi proceeding?

Today, the case is going through the courts with the appeal process. We trust in justice and in the proof of her innocence, which I was able to verify and emphasize in the report I delivered to President Zardari. Meanwhile, we will ensure all necessary protection to Asia and her family.

When will the Commission begin work on the revision of the law?

We are identifying the leaders that President Zardari will appoint in the coming days and we will begin meeting soon. We are optimistic about the success of this Commission. The obstacles are the radical Islamic groups, who want to sow hatred, to polarize the country and to bring instability, using religious pretexts. But I have high hopes for agreement on some points that will serve to prevent abuses being carried out in the name of blasphemy. The proposed revision presented to Parliament by Sherry Rehman is also of great help. I think we should find a broad consensus at the Assmebly.

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Would you like to say something to the Holy Father, who has launched an appeal for Asia Bibi?

I am deeply religious, and the Pope's words are very important in my life. I thank him for his closeness and solidarity with the Christians in Pakistan. His solace encourages me to witness to the faith in my life, despite the difficulties. I ask the Holy Father and all the faithful of the world to pray for me.

(PA) (Agenzia Fides 04/12/2010)

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