



ASIA/PAKISTAN - "Blasphemy law" at the centre of Human Rights Day

Karachi (Agenzia Fides) - "Human Rights Day 2010 is an opportunity to focus attention on the sections of the Penal Code that constitute the so-called blasphemy laws. The law is a blatant violation of human rights, permitted and legitimized by the State. It is a measure that allows and justifies injustices, discrimination and persecution. It is a law to abolish," stated Father Mario Rodrigues, director of the Pontifical Mission Societies in Pakistan, to Fides, on the eve of World Day for Human Rights, sponsored by the UN and celebrated tomorrow, 10 December. This Day, the director told Fides, "comes at a time of great tension in the Country, due to the echoes of Asia Bibi's case, a Christian woman sentenced to death exactly as a result of the blasphemy law. The uncertainty and threats from terrorist groups are a real nightmare for all those who defend the woman."

"The blasphemy law, said Fr Rodrigues, "openly contradicts the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to which Pakistan is a signatory. It is a law promulgated by the dictator Zia and never approved by any Parliament. Laws are made to protect citizens, not persecute them," he added.

The law affects religious minorities, but not only them: "Many Muslim faithful are also victims," he said. "So I would remind people what prominent moderate Muslim leaders say: the law also represents a betrayal of Islam, as it is not contained in the Koran, and the Prophet Muhammad certainly would not want violence and murder to be committed in his name. As Christians of Pakistan, we believe it is important for justice and civil society that the law be abolished, and we support any proposed revision," he continued.

Human Rights Day 2010 is dedicated by the UN particularly to all those activists who are committed to defending and promoting human rights. Father Rodrigues remarked: "Thinking of the history of Pakistan, I would like to dedicate this Day to Bishop John Joseph, who 20 years ago launched a major campaign for the respect of human rights and religious minorities in our Country. We are all heirs and debtors to his battle and his courage. I should mention, also, two campaigners for human rights who today continue this work: Father Emmanuel Mani and Peter Jacob, Director and Executive Secretary respectively of the National Commission for Justice and Peace mission of the Bishops of Pakistan. These are two people with the courage of truth, defending the victims of abuses of human rights, belonging to any religious community." (PA) (Agenzia Fides 09/12/2010)