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ASIA/PAKISTAN - Bounty on Asia Bibi, we need to prosecute imams: letter from the bishops and politicians in the government

Islamabad (Agenzia Fides) - In a letter to the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Yousaf Raza Gilani, the Bishops, political leaders and representatives of civil society in Pakistan write: prosecute the imam who put a bounty on Asia Bibi; abolish or amend the law on blasphemy, injustice and discrimination; stop the abuses; and promote the rights of minorities in accordance with the Constitution of Pakistan.
The letter, received by Fides, is signed by the Catholic Bishops: Bishop Anthony Rufin (Islamabad), Secretary of the Episcopal Conference, Bishop Joseph Coutts (Faisalabad), Bishop Andrew Francis (Multan), Bishop Max John Rodriguez (Hyderabad), Bishop Sebastian Shaw (Auxiliary of Lahore). Bringing with them the signatures of other Bishops and leaders of other Christian communities, as well as leader of Sikhs, Hindus and Baha'is, and of Khalid Masood, leader of the Council of Islamic Ideology of Pakistan. In addition, several members of the Parliament of Punjab, some judges, lawyers, military and civil society representatives, all who are Muslim, have signed.
The letter cites the case of Asia Bibi and demands the immediate prosecution of imam Yusef Qureshi of Peshawar who has promised 500,000 rupees (around € 4,500) to anyone who kills Asia Bibi, noting that this is contrary to the laws and the rule of law.
The text recalls the religious harmony that prevailed in the country before the promulgation of the law, promoted by the dictator Zia in 1986, noting that between 1947 (the date of the founding of Pakistan) and 1985 there were no allegations of blasphemy.
The letter was issued on the conclusion of a meeting held in Islamabad in recent days by the “All Pakistam Minorities Alliance”, which brought together religious leaders, parliamentarians, lawyers and members of civil society, under the leadership of Minister for Religious Minorities, Shabhaz Bhatti and with the participation of Minister for Human Rights, Mumtaz Alam Gilani. The meeting stressed the negative impact on Pakistani society for the abuse of the blasphemy law, appreciating the position of President Ali Zardari, who agreed to change it.
Meanwhile, radical Islamic groups, such as the “Jaamat-e-Islami”, the “Jammiat Ulema-e-Islam” and others who met in recent days in Rawalpindi, announced the launch of a national campaign and a global strategy, made up of advertisements, appeals, conferences, sit-ins and demonstrations, “to defend the sanctity of the Prophet Muhammad and prevent any amendment to the blasphemy law.” (PA) (Agenzia Fides 15/12/2010)

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