



ASIA/PAKISTAN - Young Christian tortured and killed by wealthy Muslim

Lahore (Agenzia Fides) – Imran Masih, a young Christian in Punjab, was tortured and killed by his employer, a wealthy Muslim land owner. This is the latest episode of abuse and bullying, ending in the death of a member of the Pakistani Christian community. A message denouncing this grave episode was sent to Fides by the “All Pakistan Minorities Alliance” (APMA), the organisation committed to protecting minorities' rights. They issued this warning: “These episodes follow one another in a context of social and religious discrimination, in which wealthy Muslims believe they can dispose of the lives of Christians, who come last in the social scale, treated as objects. They are helpless victims of attacks.” Imran Masih's case is symbolic and reflects an intolerable social system, where reported incidents of violence are just the tip of the iceberg. As APMA reported to Fides, Imran Masih, 24 years, residing in the village of Nut Kallan, was employed for two years as a driver for Mohammad Masood, a wealthy landowner in the district of Gujranwala, in Punjab. On 5 February, Imran did not go to work for health reasons. The next day, on his return, he was beaten and tortured to death. Later, Masood and his accomplices handed over the body of Imran to his father, Lal Masih, who was also employed at the estate. They claimed that the young man had committed suicide. The father, not believing this version of events and, given the numerous signs of beatings on his son's body, went to the police station and denounced the killing. However, the local police tried to dissuade him, pressured by the influential Masood. Only after intervention by activists from the APMA, who made a public protest in Gujranwala - blocking the streets and appealing to the authorities for attention - did the police officially record formal murder charges and damages against Mohammad Masood and his two accomplices. In the grief and pain of the Christian community, Imran Masih was buried on 8 February in his village of Nut Kallan. Fides sources in Pakistan say: “In cases like this, we feel the silence by the Government and by civil authorities. We feel like second rate citizens. The Federal Minister for Religious Minorities is a useful institutional figure to the Christian community to have a direct contact in the Government and to bring attention to the nation about the conditions for religious minorities. For this reason we hope that the Ministry will not be abolished by the Government.” In fact, after the resignation of Raza Gilani's Government in the next two days, we await the formation of a new government, with fewer departments. The Ministry for Minorities will likely be abolished and will become part of the Department of the Ministry for Religious Affairs. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 10/2/2011)