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ASIA/PAKISTAN - Sherry Rehman, promoter for amending the blasphemy law, incriminated for blasphemy

Lahore (Agenzia Fides) – Sherry Rehman, Parliamentarian from the Pakistan People's Party, the woman who presented the motion to the Pakistani Parliament to modify the blasphemy law has been formally charged with blasphemy. The decision was taken by a court in Multan, which enlisted the local police to register the charge of blasphemy against Rehman. The court received the denouncement by a local shopkeeper, who accuses the woman of blasphemy in her address on television in November 2010. The local police, for now, have declared her legally incompetent. In recent weeks there have been other attempts to incriminate her but other Pakistani courts have refused to give authorisation.

This news creates "discouragement and deep concern within the Christian community" which, as a local source of Fides confirms, sees its fears being realised: that it has gone beyond the idea of defining "blasphemous", and therefore, anyone who opposes the law on blasphemy can be incriminated.

Meanwhile cases are multiplying in which extremist Islamic groups openly praise the "holy war", the civil disobedience and murders. Fides sources in Pakistan's civil society express growing concern that these attitudes, however, "are not producing any solid responses from the Pakistani Government," which "should stop these preachers of hate and lawlessness." Many mullahs use the Friday sermon to convey hostile messages to increase social and interreligious tensions, to override the rule of law.

"Some are even demanding the use of nuclear bombs against India in the name of holy war in Kashmir," said a note sent to Fides from the Asian Human Rights Commission. Recently, this occurred in Lahore by Hafiz Saeed, leader of the radical Islamic group Jamaat-ud-Dawah, speaking to an audience of over 20,000 militants. Although the leader is wanted for terrorism, he was able to harangue the crowd undisturbed.

"It is absolutely incomprehensible that the Pakistani government close their eyes and allow these terrorists to circulate freely, spreading radical ideas," says the Fides source. "The authorities can not continue with this conciliatory policy towards religious extremism. Inciting religious war is a crime against humanity." The Pakistani civil society forum "Citizens for Democracy", in a note sent to Fides, appeals to the Government to stop and prosecute those who incite religious hatred and murder. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 17/2/2011)

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