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ASIA/INDIA - A new report on anti-Christian violence "re-establishes the truth": the Church presents report to the Federal Government

Bombay (Agenzia Fides) – A new report on anti-Christian violence re-establishes the truth, replacing a previous report – entrusted to Judge B. K. Somasekhara – who denied all responsibility for the attacks in Karnataka in 2008 (see Fides 1/2/2011). The new report, prepared after a field study carried out by Justice Michael Saldanha, was officially presented in Mumbai yesterday, in the presence of Cardinal Oswald Gracias, Archbishop of Bombay and President of the Episcopal Conference. The initiative was the work of the organisation Christian Secular Forum, which promoted the new investigations. The Cardinal praised the new report as being credible and transparent, bringing to light the facts: churches, schools and homes of Christians were attacked and hundreds of Christians were beaten. The wave of violence was led by the Hindu fundamentalist groups, covered up by the Government of Karnataka, currently in the hands of the Hindu nationalist "Bharatiya Janata" Party, supporter of extremist groups.

"The Catholic Church will present the new Saldanha Report to the Federal Government of India, demanding action be taken against the Government of Karnataka," Fr Charles Irudayam tells Fides, the Secretary of the Commission for Justice, Peace and Development of the Episcopal Conference of India. "The Bishops, the faithful, all Christians and human rights organisations in Karnataka have protested loudly and publicly against sectarianism, the lies and prejudices contained in the report prepared by the Commission headed by Judge Somasekhara. That document denied any responsibility by Hindu extremists, but there is overwhelming evidence about their involvement. All Christians and honest people have rejected it without hesitation.

The Report by Judge Saldanha - sent to Fides - is based on investigations that reached more than 400 locations around the State and heard some 3,000 people, including eyewitnesses and victims. The report said that without any doubt the Hindu extremist movements were the supporters and perpetrators of the violence, backed by the highest state authorities. The police, the judiciary and the executive powers in Karnataka "have attacked relentlessly against the defenceless Christians." Violence, notes the text, has been planned and executed with great precision to obtain maximum impact. There was "a flagrant violation of the rule of law" in an atmosphere of utter arbitrariness, lawlessness and anarchy.

Joseph Dias, a Catholic, Secretary General of the Christian Secular Forum, told Fides: "The report calls back the responsibility of the powers that the previous investigation had tried to conceal." Dias calls for "the immediate dismissal and the incrimination of the Prime Minister and the Interior Minister of Karnataka, responsible for having endorsed violence and crimes against defenceless citizens," and urges the Federal Government to prosecute the perpetrators of the violence in 2008, which recorded 113 attacks in 29 districts. According to local sources of Fides, in the State over the past two years there have been a further 138 episodes of anti-Christian violence. In Karnataka, of about 52.8 million inhabitants, there are about one million Christians. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 24/2/2011)

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