



## **ASIA/PAKISTAN - Bishops on Bhatti's murder: "A tragic example of the intolerant climate in which we live"**

Lahore (Agenzia Fides) – “We condemn the assassination of the Catholic Minister for Religious Minorities, Shahbaz Bhatti. We are devastated and deplore this anti-life gesture. This is a perfectly tragic example of the unsustainable climate of intolerance in which we live in Pakistan. We call on the Government, the institutions, the whole country to recognise and take decisions about these issues, because there must be an end to this situation, where violence prevails.” Archbishop Lawrence Saldanha of Lahore and President of the Episcopal Conference of Pakistan made this statement to Fides, commenting on the murder of Minister Bhatti by a terrorist commando this morning in Islamabad.

The Bishops are preparing an official statement and have planned an emergency meeting to assess the situation and decide on a strategy for the future. On the one hand they want to protect the faithful, Christian leaders and all those who are working for respect for human rights and the revision of the blasphemy law (possible new targets for the extremists). On the other hand is the desire to “awaken” public opinion nationally and internationally to call for help to combat the terrorism that is devastating the Country.

Bishop Joseph Coutts of Faisalabad and Vice President of the Episcopal Conference agrees, telling Fides: “The murder of Minister Bhatti is a great tragedy, not just for the Christians in Pakistan but for the whole country, as he was a Federal Minister. Last month, a Muslim, the Governor of Punjab was killed, today Bhatti. We are alarmed: it is the sign of the fanaticism that indiscriminately affects all those who are committed to the defence of truth, justice and peace.”

Bhatti was originally from the village of Khushpur in the Diocese of Faisalabad. Bishop Coutts remembers him thus: “He was a genuine, transparent person, of great courage. I had great respect for him. He knew he was in danger, but he would not pull back. The village of Khushpur is in mourning and the most profound sorrow. We will pray for him intensely.” (PA) (Agenzia Fides 2/3/2011)