



## **ASIA/PAKISTAN - Dialogue, compassion, religious freedom: Shahbaz Bhatti's legacy**

Multan (Agenzia Fides) – “It has been a grave loss, but we Christians in Pakistan want to transform the death of Shahbaz Bhatti into a prophecy of the Resurrection. We are in pain, but we maintain great hope: Bhatti gave his life for his faith. This is not a new experience for the Church, and we know that his sacrifice will bring abundant fruits for all of us.” This is what Bishop Andrew Francis of Multan (Punjab) and President of the Episcopal Commission for Interreligious Dialogue in Pakistan told Fides.

Bishop Francis recounts to Fides the legacy of Bhatti, that Pakistani Christians are keen to embrace: “He was a man who lived to promote the Gospel values, such as compassion, unity, and care for the marginalised. From here our work begins. We are called to be compassionate with all people, regardless of faith, race and culture, especially in times of need (as in the recent floods), to give a sign of brotherhood.”

Another important aspect, says the Bishop, is that of dialogue: “It's our job, respecting the memory of Bhatti, to continue to tirelessly promote dialogue as an instrument to understanding and appreciating each other and building peace. In Pakistan it is expressed mainly in Muslim-Christian dialogue. In this we are called to send a message to the nation, to build harmony and unity among the Pakistani people.”

The third point that the Bishop stresses is “the strong call for freedom of religion, speech and conscience. Bhatti was inspired by the words of the Holy Father. He had received a personal blessing from the Holy Father and he always had in the forefront of his mind the importance of these values. We will continue to encourage these values at all levels.”

“Bhatti,” continues the Bishop, “teaches us, finally, that there should be fruitful cooperation with the Government and the civil authorities for the common good of the nation. Looking at the life of Bhatti instils in us greater courage, greater commitment, and a deeper fidelity to the Gospel, to the Pope and to the Church.” (PA) (Agenzia Fides 5/3/2011)