



ASIA/PAKISTAN - Catholic accused of blasphemy died in prison: not convinced about a heart attack, the Church calls for clarity

Karachi (Agenzia Fides) – Regarding the case of Qamar David, the Catholic condemned to life in prison for blasphemy was found dead yesterday, 15 March, in the Karachi jail (see Fides 15/3/2011). The Catholic Church is “calling for clarity” and “wants an official report of the facts, which indicate heart failure as the cause of death”. So reports Fr Mario Rodriguez to Fides, the National Director of the Pontifical Mission Societies, from Karachi. The Catholic Church in Karachi, through the Justice and Peace Commission for the diocese, has been looking after the case, offering moral and financial assistance to the family. The Church hopes to convince the family of David to authorise an autopsy, in the presence of trusted medical personnel, to be assured of the cause of death. “The news of David's death has shocked us. Yesterday we interrupted our Lenten spiritual retreat to address the situation. We have contacted the prison authorities and spoken with the detainee who shared David's cell. He told us that David was fine but he was very afraid. Given that he was accused of blasphemy, he was often badly beaten. The story of a heart attack is unconvincing,” Fr Rodriguez notes to Fides.

Haroon Barkat Masih, Director of the Masihi Foundation, with Asia Bibi's case, comments to Fides: “It is a serious situation: a death in prison always raises all sorts of questions: we haven't forgotten other cases of Christians accused of blasphemy and killed in prison. I am convinced that David is dead due to beatings by staff and other inmates. The police and the hospital board want to cover up the true cause of death. Because of poverty and fear, the families of the victims often do not ask for new medical examinations and do not have the courage to denounce the prison authorities. Hence David's family currently needs the full support of the Church and civil society: so that they can get to the truth.”

Asia Bibi, who yesterday received a visit from her husband in prison, was also informed of the facts, and responded to Fides with this message: “With every minute that passes, I think it may be the last. Each time the door of my cell is opened, my heart beats a thousand miles an hour. I am in the hands of God. I do not know what will happen to me. In prison anyone can be judge and killer.” (PA) (Agenzia Fides 16/3/2011)