



ASIA/PAKISTAN - New case of Christian falsely accused of blasphemy

Faisalabad (Agenzia Fides) – A Christian by the name of Arif Masih, 40 years old, from the village of Chak Jhumra, in Faisalabad, was arrested on 5 April by local police accused of blasphemy. This was communicated to Fides by the Diocese of Faisalabad's Justice and Peace Commission. Arif is accused of ripping the pages of the Holy Quran and writing a threatening letter to Muslims for embracing Christianity. A blasphemy case (FIR # 133/2011) was registered under section 295-C against unknown person with local Police Station Sahiyanwala on the formal complaint of Shahid Yousaf. Now Arif Masih has been detained by police at an unknown place. The brother of Arif, Ejaz Masih, told the Justice and Peace Commission that his brother is the victim of a trap designed by Shahid Yousaf, his neighbour. Yousaf also has two brothers in the police force and who helped him carry this out.

Christians, but also Muslims who know Arif, tell Fides that “Arif Masih would not dare to commit this kind of outrageous act. He was wrongly implicated in this land dispute.”

The relatives of the victim approached Fr Nisar Barkat (Diocesan Director, National Commission for Justice and Peace) for help. Fr Barkat had a meeting with Naseem Sadiq (District Coordination Officer, Faisalabad) and other police officials requesting the release of Arif Masih. Mr Naseem Sadiq said, “Arif Masih is in safe custody and police officials are investigating the matter and we know that Arif Masih was falsely accused in this case and we will apprehend the real culprits.

The Masihi Foundation, who are defending Asia Bibi, are closely following developments and are ready to help Arif and his family. “This is the latest, blatant episode of abuse of the blasphemy law used for personal vendettas,” says the Director of the Foundation, Haroon Barkat Masih. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 9/4/2011)