



ASIA/PAKISTAN-Bin Laden killed, feared reactions against Christian churches, schools closed and churches guarded

Lahore (Fides Service) - Schools and Christian institutions closed, churches and Christian areas guarded with utmost security measures, this is the situation that the Christian community recorded in the main city in Pakistan after the news of the killing of Osama Bin Laden. The leader of Al Qaeda was killed yesterday by American special forces in a military operation in Abbottabad, around 60 km from Islamabad.

Local Fides sources report that even civil authorities have provided such security measures at Islamabad, Lahore, Karachi, Multan and other cities, because they fear violent attacks against Christian targets and reactions by the Taliban groups. Christians can be identified as a target because they are seen in propaganda and in the ideological Taliban struggle, with Westerners and the Americans, as being responsible for the death of their leader.

Paul Bhatti, Special Adviser to the Government for religious minorities, confirms to Fides: "The situation is tense. There are, in fact, strong reactions of fear, unreasonable, against Christian minorities. The government is paying close attention to preventive measures".

Fr. Mario Rodrigues, director of the Pontifical Mission Societies in Pakistan who lives in Karachi, has just come out from a meeting with the civil authorities and told Fides: "they have put us on alert, calling for the closure of our institutions and placing more police personnel in front of churches. Christians in Pakistan are innocent victims, even in this situation: any excuse is good to threaten or to attack".

On the long-term consequences of the killing of the leader of Al Qaeda, Fr. Rodrigues says: "According to some people, in the coming months the persecution against Christians could decrease and the Taliban ideological struggle weaken. We will see. We observe, however, that intolerance and radical Islamic groups are flourishing in the country, and other extremist leaders could establish themselves and continue terrorist actions. Unfortunately in recent days there have been massive attacks in Christian neighborhoods in the city of Gujranwala. We urgently need a serious policy to combat Islamic extremism by the state at all levels: in culture, education, social level but also on a political and legislative level". (PA) (Agenzia Fides 05/02/2011)