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ASIA/PAKISTAN-Christians fleeing from Gujranwala, for fear of a massacre

Lahore (Fides Service) - The faithful of the two Christian neighborhoods "Aziz colony" and "Gulzar Colony in the city of Gujranwala (Punjab province) are leaving their homes, terrified, to save their lives after the attack which occurred on Saturday, April 30. Two days ago a crowd of more than 500 extremists attacked the neighborhoods where more than 2,500 Christians live. The excuse was the discovery of a burnt copy of the Koran in a Christian cemetery in the colonies. Local Fides sources fear the occurrence of a massacre, as in episodes of Gojra, a city where, in summer 2009, the Christian houses were burned and the faithful burned alive (9 dead and many wounded) by a mob of Muslims, after a false blasphemy case.
The point is - refer concerned sources of Fides – is that Christians in Pakistani cities live in "ghetto-like neighborhoods" (the so-called "colonies"), so it is very easy to make a killing ground that, in the attack on Saturday was prevented only by prompt intervention of the police. Security measures were further strengthened yesterday and today, after news of the killing of bin Laden, but the situation remains tense. Even Paul Bhatti, Special Advisor to the Government for religious minorities went to Gujranwala to manifest the closeness of the government to Christian minorities, confirming that "the situation is under control, for the deployment of police forces that have prevented serious accidents" . Police have arrested more than 20 extremists and also three Christians. According to Fides sources, the episode is a clear mise-en-scene to find an excuse to attack Christians and incite religious hatred and violence. In front of the Christian colonies a banner appeared which read: "We condemn the burning of the Koran and the blasphemy against the Prophet, performed by Christians", addressed with offensive epithets.
In the area of Gujranwala, two weeks ago, there were anti-Christian violence, after the blasphemy case against the two Christians Mushtaq Gill and his son Farrukh who were arrested on charges of having desecrated a copy of the Koran (see Fides 18 / 4 / 2011). According to sources of Fides, the city is a hub for Islamic extremists in Punjab and it is therefore a hot spot where religious minorities are in extreme danger. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 05/02/2011)

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