



ASIA/INDIA-Young Christian woman raped and murdered in Orissa, Christians in shock: "The massacre continues"

Bhubaneswar (Agenzia Fides) - A targeted killing against the Christian community in Orissa: Banita Pradhan, a 17 year old Christian girl was raped and killed. According to Christians, extremist groups that continue to rage with impunity on Christian minorities in the state are responsible for the murder.

The body of Banita Pradhan, a college student, was found yesterday, May 15, by the police, with signs of wounds, her face disfigured, near G Udayagiri, in Kandhamal district, the scene of anti-Christian violence in 2008. The girl was kidnapped on May 9 and the family was in pain. According to the victim's father, suspicions fall on the Hindu activist Dinesh Naik and other militants, who first raped and then killed the girl.

"There is great fear among the population. The massacre of Christians continues as a trickle. The fear is that mass violence could be repeated. Today we pray and invoke God's protection. We ask the police to look into the matter seriously and they have promised a verbal commitment, but so far there have been no results," said Asit Mohanty, regional director of the Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC) in Orissa, non-governmental organization that works to defend the rights of Christians to Fides.

According to GCIC, behind the murder are the same Hindu fundamentalist groups responsible for the pogrom of 2008, but an investigation to try and punish the guilty is needed: "If the police and civil authorities will not engage - for well known reasons of collusion with extremists - this murder will go unpunished" Mohanty tells Fides.

The delegate recalled that in recent years cases of Christian girls kidnapped, raped and killed are increasing, and the phenomenon is a subtle form of intimidation to the Christian community. The GCIC has written a letter to the Prime Minister of Orissa, with an appeal to the federal Indian, so that they respect the law of the state, "where lawlessness and impunity condemn the persecution of Christian minorities."

The Christians also recall another murder mystery, that of Pastor Saul Pradhan, found dead in January 2011 in the same district. Currently, two Hindu extremists suspected of murder, were arrested.

Some months ago the local Church of Orissa had denounced to Fides the existence of "alarming reports of trafficking of young women on a large scale in Orissa. The victims are mainly Christian girls. The violence against Christians in 2008 gave the opportunity for criminal groups to find easy prey among the refugees and the poor." Banita Pradhan may have been the subject of the aims of criminal groups engaged in human trafficking. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 16/05/2011)