



ASIA/PAKISTAN - Two Christian girls have been kidnapped and converted to Islam in Punjab

Faisalabad (Agenzia Fides) - The violence on Christian girls in central Punjab has caused two other victims: as reported by the Masihi Foundation to Fides- which deals with the protection of Christians in Pakistan - two Christian girls were kidnapped by a group of Muslims and forced to convert to Islam and get married. Rebecca Masih and Saima Masih were kidnapped in Jhung the district of Faisalabad.

As explained by the two sisters' father, Rehmat Masih, a few days ago a wealthy local businessman, Muhammad Waseem, had previously warned that he wanted to marry the two girls, then threatened to kidnap them and convert them by force. Rehmat went to the police to file a complaint, but they did not take action. On Tuesday, May 24 the two girls were stopped while returning from the market, and some men kidnapped and threw them in a car owned by Waseem.

Rehmat rushed back to the police. The officers, after completing the investigation, said that "there are false accusations against Waseem," and that Rehmat, often gets drunk and starts assaulting his daughters, so they might have ran away unable to bear the torture. Other witnesses and neighbors instead swear that Rehmat is a respectable man and has never harmed his daughters.

On May 25, Muhammad Waseem forcefully married Saima Masih, in the presence of the leader Muhammad Zubair Qasim, an active member of the banned extremist group "Sip-e-Sahaba", often known for organizing kidnappings and forced conversions of Christian girls and Hindus. During the final interview, the police said to Rehmat to "forget his daughters."

Haroon Barkat Masih, Director of the Masihi Foundation, who is dealing with the case of Asia Bibi, condemns the incident and says to Fides: "Kidnapping Christian girls, conversion and forced marriages have become common practice in Punjab. The police have been bought, instead of serving the Punjab government they are servants of extremist groups. Punjab is becoming heaven for these groups: Muslim leaders openly call for violence in their sermons, without shame. Hundreds of cases like that of the Masih sisters do not come into existence. We have repeatedly appealed to the Punjab government, without receiving an answer: the government supports these groups. "

A Catholic nun in Faisalabad - who asked to remain anonymous for security reasons - is responsible to regain and hide the Christian girls who manage to flee the violence. The nun explains to Fides: "There are countless similar cases every year, that the Church of Pakistan has denounced many times, asking for respect for basic rights. The Masih sisters is a common fate of many girls and young Christian women in a society that tolerates discrimination on religious minorities, especially on women. " In her pastoral work, the nun "seeks to promote the social status of girls who, for reasons of caste or religion, are living in conditions of subordination and poverty, especially through education and professional training." (PA) (Agenzia Fides 27/05/2011)