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ASIA/PAKISTAN-The Church committed to the liberation of Farah, the Catholic girl forced to convert to Islam

Multan (Agenzia Fides) - "The Catholic Church in Pakistan will do everything possible to free Farah and return her to her family": this is what His Exc. Mgr. Andrew Francis, Bishop of Multan tells Fides, the diocese involved in the case of Farah Hatim, Catholic girl kidnapped in the city of Rahim Yar Khan (southern Punjab), forced to marry a Muslim man and convert to Islam (see Fides 11/6/2011 and days before).
In recent days, pressure from civil society and the international community has grown and the Church of Pakistan begins to hope for the liberation of the girl: "The National Commission 'Justice and Peace' has been activated and will use all means at its disposal. We are also in contact with senior police officers to try to unblock this long-standing affair. I am confident in a positive solution. We have much confidence in God and in the fruits of our prayer", the Bishop of Multan confides to Fides.
The Commission for “Justice and Peace” of the Episcopal Conference of Pakistan is completing its investigation on the case, which is emblematic of a widespread phenomenon: at least 700 Christian girls are kidnapped and forced to convert to Islam every year. According to sources of Fides, the next step to define the case, is that the Church may bring a legal action to the High Court of Lahore, asking for respect for human rights and individual freedom of the young girl, who now lives segregated. A court of first instance had already declared the case "closed" based on a written statement which says it was Farah`s will to marry and convert to Islam. The girl's family explains, however, that the statement was drawn under threats and torture. Moreover, as reported by Fides, some Christian NGOs accredited to the UN Council for Human Rights in Geneva are following the case of Farah and intend to compile a report to submit to the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 06/13/2011)

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