



ASIA/PAKISTAN - Religious freedom "under the shadow of Islamic extremism": what happened to the promise made by the Ministry for interreligious relations?

Lahore (Fides Service) - Religious freedom in Pakistan is conditioned by "the dark shadows of Islamic extremism", but also by intolerance, lawlessness and the increasing impunity in the country. This is what is said in the new report "Pakistan: Religious Freedom in the shadow of Extremism", published by the NGO "Christian Solidarity Worldwide" (CSW), which monitors the condition of Christians in the world, with particular attention to human rights and religious freedom.

Given the situation found in Pakistan, the CSW Report, sent to Fides, on the one hand calls for urgent government intervention to stop the false accusations of blasphemy, speeches which incite hatred, and impunity for acts of violence against religious minorities; on the other hand invites the government to invest in resources and energy to improve interfaith relations and promote an authentic and global reform of the education system in the country. Fides sources in the Church of Pakistan, commenting favorably to the Report, ask: "What happened to the new Federal Ministry for interreligious relations, promised by Prime Minister Gilani, after having abolished the Federal Ministry dedicated to religious minorities? (See Fides 2 / 7 / 2011). Is it the umpteenth broken promise? A Federal Ministry is useful to keep the attention on discrimination and restrictions on religious freedom high because Christian communities and other minorities of Pakistan undergo such discrimination every day".

The CSW report recalls the murders motivated by religious hatred in 2011 that affected Salmaan Taseer, Governor of Punjab, and the Catholic Shahbaz Bhatti, Federal Minister for Religious Minorities. But religious violence, observes the NGO, has not spared the Islamic Sufi shrines and the group of "Ahmadi", considered an Islamic sect: all minorities struggle to obtain justice and respect for their fundamental rights.

"There is a very big distance between the government's policy towards religious minorities and the reality of life of these groups in Pakistani society", notes the text, remembering the strong negative impact of the so-called "blasphemy law" on minorities. The CSW says it will continue to urge the government and international community so that soon a new federal ministry that takes care and protects the affairs of religious minorities is set up, ensuring the real respect for religious freedom in Pakistan. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 23/07/2011)