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ASIA/INDIA - Stop to the construction of churches in Orissa: religious freedom violated and Christians discriminated

Bhubaneswar (Agenzia Fides) - As we approach the third anniversary of the massacres in Orissa (August 24 is Memorial Day), the local Christian community continues to face harassment and violence of all kinds, on a political, legal, economic and social level. On 24 August, the symbolic day chosen to remember the massacres of 2008, the Christians in Orissa will pray and come together to commemorate the victims and to raise their voice against the injustice that still affect them. As sources of Fides in Cuttak-Bhubaneswar diocese say, the local government is patently violating the religious freedom of Christians, forbidding them to rebuild the demolished churches during the violence or building new ones in the Christian "colonies" formed in the aftermath of the massacres.

The local government in the district of Kandhamal (the one most affected by the massacres) sent a letter to the pastor of the Catholic Church of "Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal", in Mondasoro, and ordered an immediate stop to the work of reconstruction of a chapel in the Padunbadi village, claiming that the land is state property. "The church in the village - says the local parish priest, Father Laxmikant Pradhan to Fides- has been there for over two generations" and therefore the government order, which prevents the reconstruction of the church, is a clear injustice to the Christian faithful, already put to the test by displacement, hunger and poverty.

The case in Mondasoro is not the only case: a few days ago the government stopped the construction of another Catholic church in Nadagiri, always in the district of Kandhamal. Nandagiri is a neighborhood where a number of Christian families were relocated, who after being displaced after the violence of 2008, were not able to return to their villages of origin, occupied by Hindu extremists. In the colony there are 54 Catholic and 17 Protestant families of Pentecostal denomination, who continued to celebrate the cult in improvised places and had begun to build a chapel. The government, note local sources of Fides, ordered the blocking accepting the complaints of the radical hindus, but violating the principle of religious freedom guaranteed in the Constitution of India.

As reported to Fides, "the local Christians will stand against this unjust order, defending their right to worship". The Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC), an active organization in Orissa in defending the rights of Christians, has sent an open letter to the Prime Minister of Orissa, Shree Naveen Patnakiji, demanding the withdrawal of the ordinances contrary to the Indian Constitution, and the protection of the legitimate rights of Christians to practice their faith.

Thousands of faithful Christians in Kandhamal are still under evacuation, they are camped on the outskirts of cities, have lost all their possessions, live in poverty and suffer from problems of unemployment. In addition, the trials against the perpetrators of the massacres of 2008 are conditioned to often end in acquittals, perpetuating a situation of general impunity. These will be the themes of the Day of Remembrance, which will see Christians mobilized on August 24, to bring to the attention of the Indian federal government the tragic situation in Orissa.

(PA) (Agenzia Fides 22/08/2011)

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