



ASIA/NEPAL - Church and NGOs: "No to anti-conversion laws, we need to protect religious freedom"

Kathmandu (Agenzia Fides) – The necessity to protect religious freedom in Nepal and say "no" to measures such as prohibiting conversion from one religion to another is urgent, enclosed in the new Penal Code which will be approved by the Constituent Assembly together with the new Constitution: this is the appeal from the Nepali Church to Fides, from religious leaders and NGOs that defend the rights of Christians and religious freedom in the world.

In eight days time, the date fixed for the final approval of the new Constitution of Nepal (August 31) - after more than 10 years of civil war and the country's transformation from a Hindu Kingdom to a democratic state - the Christian communities in Nepal are highly concerned about attacks on religious freedom that are recorded in the drafting of the Penal Code and propose, therefore, amendments to the text.

In the report entitled "Protecting religious freedom in the new Nepal", sent to Fides, the NGO "Christian Solidarity Worldwide" (CSW) said that some measures are incompatible with international human rights treaties, especially referring to clauses that require the prohibition of conversion, in the new Penal Code, which will be voted by the Assembly.

These measures, said CSW, in other states of South Asia (anti-conversion laws are in force in some states of India) "have created prejudices and violence against religious minorities". The NGO insists that, with respect to the treaties as the "International Convention on Civil and Political Rights" (ICCPR) ", ratified by Nepal", every citizen must have the freedom to choose a religion or belief ". Nepal, underlines CSW has a really great opportunity to outline its secular character, to "promote a peaceful environment of religious pluralism and to protect the rights of all citizens".

In recent days, the Catholic Church and other Christian leaders in Nepal, gathered in the "United Christian Alliance of Nepal" and "National Council of Churches", stressing that the provisions of Article 160 of the Penal Code (which imposes a ban on conversion) contrasts with art. 23 of the Constitution, which states that "every person has the right to profess, practice and defend their religious beliefs". And a forum of religious leaders Christians, Muslims, Buddhists and Bahais, as well as various civil society NGOs, such as "Nepal National Human Rights Commission", handed over a memorandum to the Government requesting a review of the anti-conversion rule. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 24/08/2011)