



ASIA/PAKISTAN - "Mission Year": focus on the role of Christians and rights for religious minorities

Karachi (Agenzia Fides) - Rights, freedom, the role of Christians in the Pakistani society, the fight against extremism, evangelism, inter-religious harmony: these are the central themes of the Mission Year launched by the Catholic Church in Pakistan, during the 60th anniversary of the foundation of the Pontifical Mission Societies in the country. The initiative, which will open officially on September 30 and will involve all the dioceses in Pakistan, comes at a difficult time for the community of faithful Christians in Pakistan (about 2% of the population), victims of threats, violence, discrimination, evident limitations of religious freedom.

"There is no progress on the plight of Christians in Pakistan", says Fr. Mario Rodrigues to Fides, National Director of the Pontifical Mission Societies in the country. "We do not feel safe and are not adequately protected. Luckily during the month of Ramadan (the Islamic month of fasting) we were not subjected to violence, but I think it depends only on the fact that during Ramadan the Islamic groups also suspend their violent activities".

"As Christians and Pakistani citizens – he continues - we intend to ask ourselves about our role and the contribution that we can and we want to give to the nation, to build a truly democratic country, where everyone's rights are respected. We want to build harmony, peace and the common good of the country, together with all people of good will: we will start Mission Year with this spirit, which will aim to raise awareness to all the Christian communities in Pakistan, so that the values of the Gospel can illuminate today's Pakistan".

Fr. Rodrigues lives in Karachi, a city devastated in recent days by several attacks and indiscriminate violence, even places of worship, and where the tension still remains very high: "Attacks on mosques, innocent lives, even the Catholic Church of St. Joseph was hit by vandals a few days ago, the situation is difficult and people are very afraid. We ask the local and federal government to take adequate measures to ensure social peace and fight with determination and effectiveness against terrorist groups who want to destabilize the country".

With reference to the executive, the Director of the PMS says: "The government has promised a new federal Ministry for interfaith Harmony, but has not yet been officially formed. We want to see the facts, not just the claims, in the hope that religious minorities will benefit". Regarding the entry into force of the law of 2010 which provides for the allocation of 4 seats in the Senate, reserved for religious minorities (one for each province), Fr. Rodrigues says he is "pleased for the largest religious minority representation in Parliament", hoping that "this is the right path to follow in order to have some Christians in institutional seats". (PA) (Agenzia Fides 30/08/2011)