



ASIA/PAKISTAN - Kidnapping emergency: Muslims and Christians kidnapped to fund terrorist groups

Karachi (Agenzia Fides) - There is a new, growing business of kidnapping people for extortion, launched by terrorist groups in Pakistan. This is carried out to obtain ransoms and replenish the coffers of terrorist organizations like Al Qaeda. The victims are citizens of all religions, Muslims or leaders of religious minorities, people in sight, foreign citizens (especially Americans), members of wealthy families. This is the alarm launched by Father Mario Rodrigues, national Director of the Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS) in Pakistan to Fides. The priest notes "the growth of a phenomenon that has reached alarming dimensions" and calls on "the civil authorities and police to monitor it and take appropriate actions".

One of the latest victims is Shahbaz Taseer, son of former Punjab Governor, Salman Taseer, who was killed by his bodyguard in January last year, because he defended the Christian Asia Bibi, who was sentenced to death for blasphemy. In recent days, the religious minorities of the "All Pakistan Minorities Alliance" (APMA) demonstrated in Lahore and Faisalabad for Shahbaz Taseer, condemning the kidnapping and asking the Punjab government for "clarity, commitment and transparency", as the Christian Najmi Saleem, woman coordinator of the APM in Punjab refers to Fides.

"Of course, in the case of Shahbaz Taseer - notes Fr. Rodrigues - there are two hypotheses: that of kidnapping for extortion, which is already the rumor circulating in the media; or that of revenge and blackmail to obtain the release of Qadri, his father's killer, considered a hero by Islamic fundamentalist groups".

But the victims are also people in view in the Christian community, as for example Irvin John, a wealthy Catholic layman of the parish of San Lorenzo in Karachi: "He was kidnapped by a terrorist group over a month ago - says Fr. Rodrigues - and released after three weeks of imprisonment, upon payment of a large ransom". "We are all exposed to this risk - concludes the Director of the PMS - potential victims of a practice that is gaining ground in Pakistan, as a form of self-financing of terrorist organizations".

Among the latest victims of kidnappings is the U.S. official Warren Weinstein, head of the project "Pakistan Initiative for Strategic Development and Competitiveness" (PISDAC), kidnapped in August; General Tariq Majid's son-in-law, known military leader; the jeweler Malik Amir, president of the Trade Union, kidnapped a year ago and not yet released.

According to intelligence sources, the terrorist groups in Pakistan are over 40, connected to the Taliban network or Al-Qaeda, which has recently been weakened even more after the killing of the Al-Qaeda leader, and the Atiyah Abd al-Rahman leader (also known as Al-Libi) and the arrest of the other militant Younis al-Mauritani. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 06/09/2011)