



ASIA/PAKISTAN - Christians: yes to legality, but "no one touches the murderer Mumtaz Qadri"

Lahore (Agenzia Fides) - "Yes" to justice and legality, "no" to death penalty, even for Mumtaz Qadri, who killed the governor of Punjab Salman Taseer and has become for radical Islamic groups, "the hero of blasphemy". This is what is asked on behalf of the Christians in Pakistan, reported to Fides by various sources in Pakistan, and have started a public debate, in newspapers and websites, to underline the fact "of being against Qadri's death penalty". While fundamentalist groups continue to demand the release praising him "for killing a blasphemer", Christians reaffirm their "no" to death penalty. "Hands off Cain", is the principle used by the Pakistani faithful who, in this circumstance, bear witness to the defense of life and its sacredness, even if it is the life of a self-confessed killer. Christians call for justice and legality, supports the action of the judiciary, but point out that "only God is the author of life, he can give it or take it away". In an interview with Fides Rev. Alvin Samuel, protestant pastor and lawyer of the "Centre for Legal Aid Assistance and Settlement" (CLAAS), an organization with offices in London and Lahore, which provides legal assistance to Pakistani Christians, explains: "We demand that death penalty is not applied even to Qadri. We say to Muslims: let's work together for legality in Pakistan. We hope that this approach can encourage dialogue and bring harmony in society".

"Qadri - explains rev. Samuel - has the right to appeal and to pursue legal action, but everyone must respect the decisions of the Court. The extremist groups, with their campaign, are not helping the country. Qadri's case is linked to the condition of minorities and to the old problem of the blasphemy law, the abuse of which harms the entire nation. The government should do more to create an atmosphere of dialogue and respect between different religious communities".

Between 1927 and 1986, remembers rev. Samuel, there were only 7 cases of blasphemy. From 1986 onward - the period when changes to the Criminal Code were made by the dictator Zia Hul Aq - more than 4,000 cases were recorded. Between 1988 and 2005, Pakistani authorities have officially charged 647 people for crimes that fall under the blasphemy law. More than 30 people were killed for alleged blasphemy and now Asia Bibi, a Christian woman, is in prison because of an unjust death sentence for blasphemy. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 10/10/2011)