



ASIA/PAKISTAN - Christian Girl raped, and converted to Islam and forced to marry a Muslim

Lahore (Agenzia Fides) - Kidnapped and raped repeatedly for eight months by a gang of Islamic militants. Devastated and traumatized, was converted to Islam and forced to marry a Muslim. The story of Anna (fantasy name), a 12-year-old Christian girl, is similar to that of about 700, between children and Christian girls, and at least 250 Hindus who each year suffer terrible violence and abuse in Pakistan. Muslims, say sources of Fides in Punjab committed in their assistance, "see them as objects, goods, treat them like animals".

There is strong indignation in the Christian community in Pakistan, after yet another case of violence goes unpunished. As reliable sources of Fides report, "Anna's kidnappers and rapists are free because they belong to the Islamic radical group Lashkar-e-Tayyaba (banned for terrorism) and the police has even refused to order a medical check-up". The magistrate of the area has registered a complaint against some Muslim men, but has provided no restrictive measures against them. The police asked Anna's parents to consign the girl to the "legal husband" (the rapist), or they may be subject to criminal proceedings.

Anna is the 12-year-old daughter of Arif Masih, a street sweeper in Shahdra, a town near Lahore, capital of Punjab province. Anna was kidnapped by two Muslim men on December 24, 2010, lured by deception by a friend. Beaten and raped for days, she was forced to sign some documents that attest her conversion and marriage to one of the criminals, Muhammad Irfan.

On January 5, 2011 her father lodged a complaint (First Information Report) against unknown persons. Only in September, eight months after her disappearance, Anna called her family from Tandianwalla, in Faisalabad district, 190 kilometers from Lahore. She reported that she had been kidnapped but had managed to escape. Once she returned home, she reported her story to the magistrate. But Muhammad Irfan presented a marriage certificate, whereby the charge of rape also lapsed. The police advised Anna's parents to consign her to her tormentor. Anna and her parents are hiding now and militants of the Lashkar-e-Tayyaba are hunting them.

"Among other things, marriage under 16 years of age is illegal. This shows that the government, the judiciary and the Punjab Police are trying to cover the misdeeds of the Islamic radical groups and are accomplices", notes a source of Fides. In Pakistan it is common practice for Islamic extremist groups to abduct and rape girls belonging to religious minorities, Christian and Hindu. According to Amarnath Motumal, a lawyer and member of the "Human Rights Commission of Pakistan", an NGO-known and widespread in all provinces, 20 Hindu girls are abducted and forcibly converted each month.

Christian organizations and civil society have collected many cases and stories where the police have omitted to investigate, are asking the government for decisive action and appeal to the United Nations to stop such abuses concerning human rights. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 11/10/2011)