



ASIA/PAKISTAN - Paul Bhatti's appeal: "News blackout for Asia Bibi's salvation"

Islamabad (Agenzia Fides) - "I appeal for news blackout from now on, with regards to Asia Bibi's case. It is necessary not because one wants to hide the truth or silence the media, but to really be able to act for the salvation of women, away from the spotlight and the attention of fundamentalist groups. I appeal to the conscience and responsibility of all": is the appeal launched through Fides, by Paul Bhatti, brother of the murdered minister, Shabhz Bhatti, and Special Adviser to the Prime Minister of Religious Minorities Affairs.

"The case of Asia Bibi – explains Bhatti to Fides - is a tragic case, but it is not the only one: there are hundreds of other people who suffer from the abuse of the blasphemy law. As government we believe that the law should be amended or abolished. But we must find the way and the right time".

At this stage, there is a renewal of protests on behalf of Islamic extremist groups in favor of Mumtaz Qadri, Salman Taseer's murderer, who was former governor of Punjab, and had defended Asia Bibi and requested a change in the blasphemy law. Qadri was sentenced to death and is now waiting for the trial at the High Court in Islamabad. Bhatti said that: " Mumtaz Qadri, a criminal, may be declared a national hero by Islamist extremists which is unacceptable, for an elementary sense of justice and humanity, and for the first principles of faith". Meanwhile, the judge Pervez Ali Shah, who condemned Qadri to death at first instance, was forced to leave the country because of threats received by extremist groups.

According to the Counsellor, "to improve the conditions of religious minorities in Pakistan, we must work for a change of mentality and culture in the country, working in two directions: education and interfaith dialogue, so that one can promote values common to all such as respect for human life, tolerance, the construction of a peaceful nation". "I recently met with over 50 imams (Islamic prayer leaders) with whom we discussed these issues", says Bhatti to Fides. Even abroad, continues Bhatti, "I met with religious Islamic representatives from Turkey and Indonesia, discussing the ways and means to reduce intolerance. Education at university level for all the imams is urgently required, to curb the fundamentalist schools of thought". (PA) (Agenzia Fides 26/10/2011)