



## ASIA/SAUDI ARABIA - A Philippine worker has been arrested for blasphemy: Bishops appeal for his release

Riyadh (Agenzia Fides) - A Catholic Filipino worker, who emigrated to work in Saudi Arabia has been arrested on charges of blasphemy. As reported to Fides by the organization "Brotherhood in the Middle East", which deals with Filipino migrants in countries with a Muslim majority, the man, a 32 year-old native of Laguna (near Manila) was arrested by the religious police for an alleged offensive plan towards the Prophet Muhammad, discovered by the supervisor of the company where he worked, who informed the police. The arrest took place last October 14. According to the organization, the accusation could be false and instrumental, as "the man and his superior had a discussion during a work assignment". "Filipino workers abroad have high regard and respect for the Prophet Mohammed", stressed the association, which has been in contact with the Philippine Embassy in Riyadh. Asked by Fides, His Exc. Mgr. Precioso D. Cantillas, President of the Commission for Migrants and Itinerant People, in the Episcopal Conference of the Philippines, says: "As Bishops, we ask for forgiveness and the man's release. First the facts need to be established. It will not be easy to know and understand what the man really did. Filipinos in Saudi Arabia have a completely different faith and a culture compared to the country where they are and there may be a misunderstanding at the base of the case".

"The context for thousands of Filipino Catholic workers, is very difficult in all countries, with an Islamic majority pervaded by fundamentalism. Our appeal is crucial to religious freedom and the fundamental respect toward all human beings".

The Filipino migrant workers in Saudi Arabia are over one million, all Catholics. In past months the government in Riyadh blocked entry visas for Filipino and Indonesian workers, after the authorities of the two Asian countries had called for more guarantees on working conditions. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 26/10/2011)