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ASIA/PAKISTAN - A Bishop and a Pastor are forced to leave the country on false charges of blasphemy

Lahore (Agenzia Fides) - The Protestant Bishop Mgr. Pervaiz Joseph and Pastor Baber George were forced to flee abroad, because they were victims of false accusations of blasphemy and threatened with death by Islamic radicals, as well as leaders of an organization funded by the Pakistani government. This is what Pastor Mustaq Gill told Fides, President of the "Legal Evangelical Association Develpment" (LEAD), an association of Christians of all denominations, including in particular lawyers and provides legal assistance and protection to Christians in Pakistan. The LEAD, reports the President to Fides, "has organized the expatriation of the two leaders, in danger of life, and today is providing to ensure a safe haven for their families". "It is a very sad story and a symbol of the persecution that Christians suffer in the name of the blasphemy law", explains Gill to Fides, as "the Bishop is a well-known personality and very involved in interfaith dialogue and in peace at national and provincial level in Punjab".
The Bishop and the Pastor, who were both working in Lahore (in Punjab), in the last seven years met several Muslim political and religious leaders, facing a number of issues concerning the blasphemy law and the conditions of Christians. "In the past few weeks - explains Pastor Gill - during one of these exchanges of views, they were accused of using contemptuous words against the Prophet Muhammad, an offense that the two did not commit in any way".
The Bishop, refers a source of Fides, was the Christian representative of the organization "International Peace Council For Interfaith Harmony" (IPCIH), which receives funding from the Pakistani government. It was the leader of the Council himself, Haji Rana Tahir Rehmat, who along with other Islamic religious leaders of the Islamic movement "Sunni Tehreek", launched the false accusations of blasphemy, delegitimizing the Christian leaders and sending upstream years of working together. According to some, the two Christians became unpopular to the Council because they decided to start a new association to protect the rights of Christian communities in Pakistan.
Asked by Fides, the Catholic Akram Gill, Minister of State in the "Federal Ministry of Harmony", assured that "he will acquire all the necessary information on the case and take appropriate action", reaffirming the commitment of the Pakistani government for interreligious dialogue. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 15/11/2011)

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