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ASIA/INDIA - "Crimes against humanity in the massacres of Christians in Orissa": Report of the People's Tribunal

New Delhi (Agenzia Fides) - Violence against Christians in Orissa violate human rights and the Constitution; they have been carefully planned and are considered "crimes against humanity"; they have a strong impact on women and children; they occur with the complicity of public officials and today they still remain unpunished: this is what the new Report of the National People's Tribunal on Kandhamal, district of the state of Orissa theater of anti-Christian massacres of 2008.

The Tribunal, which on the initiative of the National Solidarity Forum, brings together leaders and representatives of civil society, today published a new Report in Bhubaneswar titled "Waiting for Justice". The Document, sent by the local Church to Fides, aimed at assisting the victims and survivors of violence 2008 to seek justice, in order to restore law and build peace. The Report is based on the testimonies of 45 survivors and draws upon the contents of studies, field surveys, research by 15 experts.

Among the major observations, the text speaks of "targeted violence against the adivasi and dalit Christian community, which violates the fundamental right to life, liberty and equality, guaranteed by the Constitution" through the use of religion as a weapon to political mobilization. The attacks of 2008 " were executed with substantial planning and preparation. The violence meets all the elements of 'crimes against humanity', as defined in applicable international law", the Report says. "Christians who refused to convert to Hinduism were brutally killed" and their property destroyed.

The Tribunal also underlines the gendered impact (number of cases of sexual violence against women) and children, traumatized because they have witnessed horrific violence to the their close familty members. The Christian community today lives "a sense of rootlessness", caused by the absence of houses, lands, churches, and "the boycott against Christians continues", discriminated against on grounds of religion, caste and gender.

The Report underlines with grave concern, "the connivance of public officials with the forces of violence and deliberate support to violence", saying that "state agencies have blatantly failed" in protecting the population. Even today, justice is slow and most of the crimes remain unpunished, because "the complicity of the police and their collusion with the perpetrators, during the phase of investigation and prosecution", and also because the witnesses are threatened and intimidated. "The meagre compensation to the victims – notes the text - are clearly indicative of the indifference of the State government".

Given the urgency of the situation, the Report challenges the institutions to take appropriate measures, in the punishment of the perpetrators, in compensation to the victims and the social aid (providing government jobs, loans for commencement of small businesses, education for children) . The authorities are also invited to tackle the problem of landlessness and land alienation of the dalits and adivasis and to stop many who still violate Articles 153a and 153b of the Indian Penal Code ("promoting enmity between different groups"), in order to stop those who continue to propagate hate and incite violence against religious minorities, in order to really protect the right to religious freedom. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 05/12/2011)

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