



## **ASIA/PAKISTAN-Churches patrolled by the police for the Christmas Masses**

Lahore (agenzia Fides) - More than 2,500 police will be present to protect Christian churches in Pakistan during the Christmas weekend, to avoid attacks by radical Islamist groups. As local sources of Fides report, the approximately 430 existing Christian churches in Pakistan will have "special security measures" to avoid Christian minorities being targeted and to ensure that the people can celebrate Christmas in serenity and peace. "There are about 2,500 police, including snipers, to protect the faithful Christians at Christmas," said a police spokesman in Lahore, in Punjab, home to the majority of Christians and their places of worship. "We have given priority to 38 churches, 20 of which are widely attended by foreign Christians participating in the Christmas Mass," he added.

The Christians, who represent about 3% of the population, are particularly discriminated against and subjected to abuse and violence in Pakistan. As reported to Fides by official sources, over the past five years, nearly 5,000 people have been victims of attacks by fundamentalist groups in Pakistan: a quarter of the victims are Christians. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 23/12/2011)