



ASIA/PAKISTAN-More than 160 indicted and 9 killed for "blasphemy" in 2011; 1,800 Christian and Hindu girls converted to Islam by force

Lahore (Agenzia Fides) - The controversial blasphemy law continues to claim victims in Pakistan, while religious minorities suffer from rampant extremism. In 2011, because of the "black law" (composed of the articles 295b and 295c of the Penal Code), at least 161 people were indicted and 9 were killed with extrajudicial executions, the victims of blasphemy accusations. Such accusations, said a Muslim lawyer recently, anonymous for security reasons, "are false in 95% of cases".

According to a report sent to Fides by the Asian Human Rights Commission, an NGO which monitors human rights on the continent, "Pakistan has failed to ensure respect for human rights for its people". The Commission documented in 2011 the killing of 18 human rights activists and 16 journalists, engaged in a work of denunciation of the evils of society, corruption and Islamic extremism.

The year 2011 saw the killing of high profile personalities, such as the governor of Punjab, Salman Taseer and the Federal Minister for minorities, Shab haz Bhatti, "murders committed by religious extremist groups infiltrated in the police force", notes the Commission. "The state played an ambiguous role to appease the religious extremism and remained a silent spectator of such killings" is what is underlined. "This government's ineptitude - the text continues - has favored forced conversion to Islam of girls from minority religious groups: in total, in 2011, about 1,800 girls between Hindus and Christians, were forced to convert to Islam, with means such as kidnapping and rape".

The Report, recalling the 161 indicted and 9 killed for "blasphemy", notes that "the government has not made any progress on the draconian blasphemy law, which has cost many lives". "Authorities -it states - have taken on, in secret, a paternalistic attitude towards the militant groups. The courts have proven to be friends of the militants and terrorists. In many cases the terrorists were released by the courts, under the guise of formal or procedural deficiencies". The text also mentions hundreds of "honor killing" deaths, the increase in sectarian violence in Karachi (1,800 deaths in 2011) and Baluchistan (225 deaths, more than 6,000 missing).

The Commission also criticized the absence of a reform of the criminal justice system. The current criminal justice system exists in parallel with the Sharia laws: "The rule of law has deteriorated because of this system", he concludes. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 16/01/2012)