



## **ASIA/PAKISTAN - Hopes for Asia Bibi, but "the extremists would not accept her release"**

Lahore (Agenzia Fides) - "Even if her accuser changed his mind and withdrew the false accusations that led to Asia Bibi's sentence for blasphemy, the Islamic extremists would not accept her release. Asia Bibi, for them, remains blasphemous for life and is in danger of life": is what the Dominican Fr James Channan OP, Director of the "Dominican Peace Center" in Lahore says to Fides, commenting on the rumors circulating about the possible change in Qari Salam's testimony, among the accusers of the woman. "We all hope for a peaceful and appropriate resolution, but I can say that today the radical Islamist groups, although not very strong on a political and parliamentary level, are very influential and very powerful in the streets and squares: they have a great mobilization capacity and militants ready for anything. Asia Bibi, if she were released, would certainly not be safe", notes the Dominican, pointing out that an imam had even put a reward for who would kill Asia Bibi on his head.

While awaiting the date for the reopening of the appeal trial before the High Court of Lahore, Fr. Channan recalls the old problem of the judiciary system in Pakistan: "It is liable to pressure from Islamic extremists and far from guaranteeing justice, especially towards religious minorities". According to the priest, "this is evident to the Courts of first instance, but is also valid for the Courts of Appeal: let us remember it was the Lahore High Court which stopped President Zardari, who wanted to give Asia Bibi presidential forgiveness, while today a former president of Lahore High Court is Mumtaz Qadri's lawyer, Qadri confessed being Salman Taseer's murderer, governor of Punjab".

The fact that religious extremism is strong in the country, adds Fr Channan, is also demonstrated by "the long trail of excellent kidnappings and murders that follow: just think of the execration kidnapping of two European aid workers in Multan (the Italian Lo Porto and the German Johannes, ed), committed to helping flood victims". Today, the Christian community in Pakistan, in particular, is concerned about a possible alliance of the "Muslim League-N" with small groups and fundamentalist Islamic religious parties, in sight of next year's elections. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 25/01/2012)