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ASIA/PAKISTAN - Church, Government, imam committed to save Rimsha, a Christian girl accused of blasphemy

Islamabad (Agenzia Fides) - There is a joint effort of the Church, the government, religious leaders, NGOs, to save Rimsha Masih, an 11-year-old Christian Protestant girl, suffering from Down syndrome, accused of blasphemy in Rawalpindi. In past days, the little girl, accused of burning pages of the Koran, was denounced on the basis of Article 295b of the Criminal Code (which with the 295c forms the so-called "law of blasphemy") and put in prison. The story, which has shaken the world's public opinion, sees "the commitment of institutions and religious leaders for her release," this is what the Catholic Paul Bhatti, Advisor to the Prime Minister for National Harmony told Fides. Fides sources inform that the child is in an isolated cell in prison and is suffering greatly in terms of emotional and psychological stress because for someone who has Trisomy 21, the relationship with the family is very important.
At a legal level, in a case, note sources of Fides, "which is clearly totally invented", the "All Pakistan Minorities Alliance" (APMA) is following the story: it is about to form a medical Commission that, considering all the elements, can establish in an unequivocal manner the innocence of the young girl. At that point the judge can release her. "We are confident and the collaboration of the imam was prescious," notes Bhatti.
Muslim leaders have not accepted, as requested by the radicals, to launch anathemas from the pulpits of mosques and "incite the assault of Christians": this has prevented a bloodbath. Nevertheless, the situation is tense, and the police ensure the safety of Christians living in the suburb, in Rawalpindi, where, among about 700 families, Rimsha's family lived. The family has been moved to a safe place. "The situation is under control," said Bhatti, but the area is monitored by agents, as a few days ago a crowd of one thousand extremists had decided to set fire to the homes of innocent Christians. More than 600 people, terrified, have fled and found temporary shelter with other families, or they are camped in churches and barracks in Rawalpindi. Some priests of the diocesan Caritas are working to provide them with food and other assistance. In addition to the support of displaced persons, the Catholic Church has activated the Commission "Justice and Peace" of the Episcopal Conference. "We are examining the case: we will offer our contribution to withdraw the FIR (First Information Report) which falsely accuses the child," says to Fides Fr. Emmanuel Yousaf, National Director of the Commission. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 23/08/2012)

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