



ASIA/PAKISTAN - The verdict on the case of Rimsha has been postponed; for doctors she is a minor and mentally disabled

Islamabad (Agenzia Fides) - The hearing of the Court of Islamabad on the case of Rimsha, the Christian girl in prison on charges of blasphemy has been postponed to August 30 (see Fides 23/08/2012). The reason for the postponement is procedural and relates to the demand for the formation of the medical Commission that was entrusted with the task of examining the child. Rimsha's defense had to resubmit it to the magistrate.

Fides sources confirm the results of the medical exams, carried out yesterday and anticipated by the Pakistani press: in a report submitted to the Judges, the Medical Commission constituted by a court in Islamabad, after examining the child, asserts that Rimsha is a minor (legal age is 18), considering her age is "less than 14." It also defines her mental level "not equal to her age," but about 8-9 years old.

Based on these findings, Tahir Naveed Chaudhary, the girl's lawyer, then submitted to the Court a request for immediate release, since, according to the provisions in force concerning children, the complaint ("First Information Report") must be canceled immediately. According to the Pakistan Criminal Code in fact, she should not even have been arrested and detained. According to art. 82 and 83 of the Penal Code, in the section on juvenile justice, the act of a child under twelve years of age "cannot be defined as an offense," given that the subject "has not reached the legal age of understanding to judge the nature and consequences of her conduct." A Pakistani Catholic lawyer, contacted by Fides, confirms that "according to the law, the police violated the procedure and the courts have held the girl in custody illegally for nine days." The child should have been housed in a specialized institute for children and not in a prison. In addition, the law provides that "a judge's assistant should give a report on the child's character, education, social status and morale," before any pronouncement: this provision was not respected.

Police arrested Rimsha on Aug. 16 due to the pressure of hundreds of Islamic radicals, accusing her of having burned a page with the words of the Koran. More than 600 Christian families in the neighborhood Mehra Jafar, where the Rimsha's family lived, have had to flee for fear of retaliation on behalf of extremists. Meanwhile, about 100 Christian residents have camped out in a park in Islamabad where they have begun to build huts and a small chapel made of wood. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 28/08/2012)