



## **ASIA/PAKISTAN - Rimsha, new postponement: the counter-party does not recognize the medical report**

Islamabad (Agenzia Fides) - The case of Rimsha Masih, an 11-year-old Christian girl accused of blasphemy in Pakistan gets more and more complicated. This morning, at the hearing before the judge Javad Abbas, a Court of First instance in Islamabad, the lawyer defending the child, Tahir Naveed Chaudhry, found something new: the lawyers of the counter-party (in this case the boy who had filed a complaint against Rimsha, signing the First Information Report, as an eyewitness of the blasphemous act) were present. So far, in previous hearings, the counter-party was absent. The lawyers raised an objection, questioning the results of the examination on Rimsha carried out by the medical Commission and not recognizing the final report. The judge therefore ordered that this report is subject to a review by experts (forensic experts and senior officials) of the state. The Court then set a new hearing for after tomorrow, September 1st.

The lawyer Tahir Naveed Chaudhry, revealing his and Rimsha's family disappointment, explains to Fides: "We had to deal, for the first time with other lawyers, who did their job. Now we have to wait for the results of this check concerning the Report of the medical Commission, then everything will be in the hands of the Court. I think that September 1st could be the final hearing on the case. We remain confident about the outcome."

Fides sources note that the "counter-party" lawyers were probably funded by radical groups that oppose the release of Rimsha, some of whom were in the courtroom. What surely had an influence were Maulana Tahir Ashrafi's statements, leader of the "All Pakistan Ulema Council": in recent days he said that the bearers of false accusations against Rimsha Masih (including the imam of the mosque in the neighborhood) should be punished by law and. So a legal battle began and Rimsha is a victim: as confirmed to Fides by the lawyer Chaudry, "the girl is in jail and is not well, she is suffering a lot because of the absence of her parents."

Peter Jacob, Executive Secretary of the Commission "Justice and Peace" of the Episcopal Conference, told Fides: "It is sad that, like Rimsha, false accusations of blasphemy cases continue to occur: it is a trend that is recognized in Pakistan and should be stopped. However it should be noted that there is great sympathy towards Rimsha and also on behalf of the Pakistani media: this confirms the growing sensitivity in civil society, the media and also in the Muslim community. In Pakistan there is an introspection on the meaning and consequences of this law. We hope that some forms of safeguards are introduced to stop the abuse and protect the innocent victims. I believe that the debate in the media can create the conditions and the cultural terrain useful to intervene and change the law." (PA) (Agenzia Fides 30/08/2012)