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ASIA/PAKISTAN - Rimsha is free; her case upholds the review of the blasphemy law

Islamabad (Agenzia Fides) - This morning the Pakistani judge Muhammad Azam Khan granted the bail for Rimsha Masih, a Christian teenager arrested in Pakistan on charges of blasphemy for having burned pages of the Koran. The fee for her release was set at 500 thousand rupees, about 4500 euro. The request for bail was accepted because the evidence was deemed insufficient to continue the detention of a minor, who suffers from mental disabilities. The ruling of the judge, first announced for 3 pm local time- after the Friday prayer - was then anticipated by surprise.
"The decision in favor of the child is positive for many reasons," says to Fides Agency Professor Mobeen Shahid, professor of Islamic thought and religion at the Pontifical Lateran University. According to the professor, "for the first time it was possible to show clearly how the blasphemy law can be manipulated by false accusations. This helps the reflection already under way on possible changes in the procedures for the application of this law." Shadid indicates some points that may be subject to adjustment: "Before accepting any complaint of blasphemy, necessary facts have to be rigorously screened through appropriate investigations. The accusers should be kept in isolation to prevent reactions to instigate hatred among the masses, until the accusation has not been proven. And if then allegations prove to be false - and this is also suggested by the Ulema - the accusers have to be punished."
"Rimsha's case - says to Fides father Inayat Bernard, co-director of the magazine "The Christian View" in Lahore - is an opportunity to review the whole application of the blasphemy law, which caused many victims in the past among religious minorities but also among Muslims, due to the many abuses. The new awareness that Rimsha's case has generated in the Pakistani public opinion is a step forward and an opportunity not to be missed in Pakistani society to affirm the respect for human dignity and rights. As a Christian community we hope that the institutions, political parties and religious communities, in the light of recent developments, may converge in the common desire to avoid Pakistan in the instrumental use of religion." (GV). (Agenzia Fides 07/09/2012).

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