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ASIA/PAKISTAN - Rimsha will not be in the courtroom for the trial; the blasphemy law is "a thorn for the country"

Islamabad (Agenzia Fides) - Rimsha Masih, a Christian girl accused of blasphemy and released on bail by a Court in Islamabad, will not be in the courtroom for the trial, scheduled for tomorrow, September 14. This is confirmed to Fides by Rimsha's lawyer, the Christian Tahir Naveed Chaudhry, of the "All Pakistan Minorities Alliance". According to the procedures in force, explains the lawyer, the accused on bail must be present only if the Public Prosecutor expressly asks it and the judge orders it. This was not asked. Chaudry says he is "optimistic about the case, because there is no evidence against Rimsha," but states that "it will take some time before there is full acquittal."
Commenting on the story, Fr. Robert McCulloch, a missionary from St. Colombano has been in Pakistan for 34 years, and has a deep knowledge of the country, says to Fides Agency: "Rimsha's case served to something: it can be the beginning of the end of the abuse of the blasphemy law, which is like a fishbone in the throat of Pakistan. The Government will be able to refer to Rimsha for similar future cases." "The president of Pakistan, Ali Zardari - recalls Fr. McCulloch - pledged his commitment to prevent abuse of the police and the judicial system in the application of the blasphemy law. Rimsha's case has led to very important developments, as the flagrant abuse of the law has come under the eyes of all. Institutions, Islamic leaders, the entire society has condemned it."
"Now - continues the missionary - despite the tragedy of this girl, Rimsha's story can help to stop the abuse of the law. We need to work together with the institutions to stop the exploitation of the law, which is against the original spirit of the nation, as desired by the founder Ali Jinnah, who envisioned an inclusive and harmonious Pakistan. It is a law created by a dictator and is clearly unbalanced, it ruins the image of Pakistan at an international level, so it is in the common interest to be able to change it." (PA) (Agenzia Fides 13/09/2012)

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