



## **ASIA/PAKISTAN - Child soldiers and young suicide bombers increase**

Islamabad (Agenzia Fides) - In Pakistan there are more than 10 million child workers between 10 and 15 years of age, many of whom work in fisheries, mines and kilns. According to the latest annual report of the Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child (SPARC), entitled "The State of Pakistan's Children 2011", following the continuous flooding of the country, 1.8 million children have dropped out of school in the last 2 years. Street children live mainly in the cities of the flood-affected areas, and only 53% of these receive nutritional programs. Meanwhile, the armed conflicts in the north have increased the recruitment of child soldiers and suicide bombers. The phenomenon is exacerbated by the number of schools that have been forced to close. The militants have destroyed or partially damaged 710, penalizing 600 thousand young children in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The tribal areas under the Federal Administration had already closed 956 schools in 2010 because of military threats. The current political and economic scenario has exacerbated the phenomenon of child labor. The intensification of the energy crisis in the country has increased the demand for labor, and the increase of children working in factories. Furthermore, the government has reduced spending on education. The decisive factor was the impact of religious fundamentalism in children. Because of the lack of supervision and regulation by the government, in non-registered Islamic schools extreme forms of corporal punishment carried out by authorized religious were found.

The Islamization of textbooks discriminates non-Muslim students. Children who are part of minorities are forced to convert to Islam through violence and kidnappings, due to the work of extremist organizations. SPARC's report states there are 2,303 cases of sexual abuse on minors, 1,421 cases of detention, 7,000 cases of kidnappings, 167 deaths of child soldiers in the northern province and 27 young Hindus kidnapped in the last months of 2011 for ransom. (AP) (Agenzia Fides 01/10/2012)