



ASIA/BANGLADESH - Blasphemy on Facebook: Buddhist temples destroyed by Islamic extremists, Christians are frightened

Chittagong (Agenzia Fides) - There are 22 Buddhist temples on fire, as well as two Hindu temples and more than 100 private houses: this is the toll of a day of violence committed by more than 20 thousand Muslim militants against Buddhist and Hindu minorities, which took place in Ramu, Ukhia, Patia and Teknaf sub-districts, in the province of Chittagong. As confirmed to Fides by local sources, violence began on the evening of September 29 and continued for a whole night and a day. The destroyed temples are among the most venerated pagodas by the Buddhists in the country. Violence was triggered, according to the Muslims, by the offensive photo towards the Koran, published by some Buddhists on the social network "Facebook".

Fr. Adam S. Pereira, Superior of the Congregation of Holy Cross, which is widespread in Bangladesh, with many nuns and priests in Chittagong, expressed in an interview with Fides "deep concern for the very tense situation in the province," reporting "the fears of all the confreres, the religious nuns and Catholic lay, a small minority, who witnessed a blind and indiscriminate violence."

His Exc. Mgr. Moses M. Costa, Bishop of Chittagong, told Fides: "We are very saddened, we did not expect this to happen. The two communities are blaming each other, but the violence is used as an excuse: Islamic fundamentalist groups seek footholds to unleash it. We Christians, could become the next targets. We will refer to the Episcopal Conference: We condemn all forms of violence and call for respect towards all religious communities in the name of harmony."

In a statement sent to Fides Agency, the Asian Centre for Human Rights (ACHR) reports that security forces have not arrested any of the guilty, and the only person arrested was a faithful Buddhist. "The attacks are part of a wide conspiracy against religious minorities, which involve the Bangladesh Army and the Islamic fundamentalists," the statement said. The Centre calls on the UN Secretary General, Ban Ki Moon, to intervene with the Government of Bangladesh in order to end attacks against religious minorities, to bring those responsible to justice, to rebuild the temples burned, to adequately compensate the victims. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 01/10/2012)