



## **ASIA/BANGLADESH - A Bishop: "Christian Children kidnapped and converted in madrassas or sold as slaves"**

Chittagong (Agenzia Fides) - It is a phenomenon that "disturbs the Catholic community in Bangladesh" and that "has to be monitored by the police": Christian children, of the tribal communities, are kidnapped, sold to "madrassas" (Koranic schools) and converted to Islam or "end up in the hands of unscrupulous traffickers who sell them abroad as slaves." This is the alarm launched to Fides Agency by His Exc. Mgr. Moses M. Costa, Bishop of Chittagong. "I talked to some people in our communities - explains the concerned Bishop - who reported to the police this illegal practice. People are afraid. Families who, after being deceived, rescue their children, are then forced to flee and hide in order to escape retaliation. We try to provide shelter and assistance to these people. We call for a decisive intervention of the police to ensure legality and the freedom of our communities."

The phenomenon is common for children of ethnic Tripura, especially in the mountainous area of "Chittagong Hill Tracts" (CHT). According to data provided by Catholic activists to Fides Agency, there are about 105 Christian children "rescued" from madrassas in recent months, because they managed to escape. The dynamic is known: some brokers, who pretend to be agents of humanitarian organizations and agencies offering work, go to tribal families and promise to provide education for their children. Families, with the idea of improving the social and cultural condition of the children, pay up to 15 thousand Takha (145 euro) to educate them. But traffickers sell children to madrassas, where they are Islamized, acquiring a new Muslim name. From that moment onwards, "it becomes difficult to find and rescue them," explain sources of Fides. Another branch is that of human trafficking: children are sold abroad, often to wealthy families in Arab countries or in the Arabian Peninsula, where they become little slaves.

In the CHT region radical Muslim organizations are active and accuse missionaries to carry out forced conversions, but it is also a struggle among Muslim settlers who illegally occupy the lands of indigenous people: all this is done, note sources of Fides, with the complicity of the police. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 05/10/2012)