



ASIA/PAKISTAN - Religious leaders: "It is urgent to change the blasphemy law and to condemn those who burned the church in Mardan"

Lahore (Agenzia Fides) - "There should be no clash among civilizations because of the sin of one person. If anyone profanes Islam or commits a crime in the West or in America, none of the Christians in Pakistan must be involved or considered responsible. Everyone must respect the religions in the world": is what solemnly Christian and Muslim religious leaders say, gathered recently in Lahore, at a conference organized by the "National Council for Interreligious Dialogue." In a message sent to Fides, the Franciscan Fr. Francis Nadeem OFM Cap, Coordinator of the Council, explained: "Whenever a person commits an act of blasphemy in the West or in America, Christians in Pakistan are considered to be the culprits. A Pakistani Christian, instead, could not even begin to think of committing such acts." The monk recalls the cases of Christians accused of blasphemy: "They are false and based on conspiracy to resolve personal disputes." Hence the appeal to "improve the use of this law", to prevent abuse. "If such cases occur, everyone should think before taking any action and accuse others of blasphemy. It is very important to avoid unpleasant situations that affect the lives and property of Christians in Pakistan," adds Fr. Nadeem.

The religious leaders present at the conference (Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and Parsis) have condemned the burning of St. Paul's Church and the Bible and other sacred books in Mardan, demanding "respect between Muslims and Christians and respect for all places of worship." Mufti Syed Hussain Ashiq, Qari Muhammad Zawar Bahadur, Pir Akhtar Rasool and members of different Islamic factions, such as Allama Naeem Badshah (Salafi), Quaid Ahl-e-Hadis and Allama Muhammad Mumtaz Awan (of the Deobandi movement) are among the those who have agreed on these points, joining the common call for harmony. All participants, after having strongly condemned the burning of the church in Mardan, unanimously approved a resolution calling the Government of Pakistan to arrest the culprits and punish them according to the laws of the country. (PA-FN) (Agenzia Fides 08/10/2012)