



## **ASIA/INDIA - The government "uses the bludgeon" against civil society: the Catholic NGO "Cordaid" blocked**

New Delhi (Agenzia Fides) - The Indian government "is using the bludgeon with civil society." Is what John Dayal, a lay Catholic intellectual and writer, responsible for the "All India Catholic Union" and collaborator of the Commission "Justice and Peace" of the Indian Bishops says to Fides Agency. Having already withdrawn 4,300 licenses for as many non-governmental Organizations (NGOs), the federal government of India is targeting organizations of European countries and the U.S.A. The government, notes Dayal, "seems to stifle critical voices of civil society, which rise on issues such as torture, religious freedom, death penalty, military exercises in the Northeast of the country".

The favourite weapon used by the government is "the threat to cancel the license that allows NGOs, in particular to religious groups of all faiths, to carry out their projects, thanks to the foreign financial aid."

The primary recipients of donations and development projects managed by Churches, Catholic and Protestant groups, associations and NGOs, are largely the poor and marginalized communities, tribals and dalits. NGOs depend on foreign funds to carry out their humanitarian activities and cooperation, for the most part in the areas of education and health care. Now, informs Dayal, the government of the Union has issued orders that "virtually prevent the financing of certain European and the U.S.A. agencies ". Indian groups have been told they must obtain prior authorization from the Ministry of the Interior, which complicates and considerably slows down procedures.

Among the institutions "blocked" there is "Cordaid" Dutch Catholic organization, guilty of having given some funds to some Indian NGOs that ask for the repeal of the "Law on special powers to the armed forces" responsible for human rights violations in Kashmir and Northeast India. "Cordaid" also financed the anti-corruption campaign led by the social activist Anna Hazare. This provision has created panic among the NGOs that risk bankruptcy: among them, the NGOs working for the rehabilitation of victims and refugees, after the anti-Christian violence in Orissa.

The Indian government justifies such acts in the name of transparency and "national security." But, according to experts "there are no real fears about crime or terrorist infiltration." The measure, concludes Dayal to Fides, is a form of pressure on civil society organizations, on the other hand "a concession to the Hindu right that accuses the West of financing conversions to Christianity."

Among the more than two million NGOs in India, those registered at a federal level are 38,436. Of these, 21,508 receive contributions from abroad. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 30/10/2012)