



ASIA/PAKISTAN - A Christian accused of blasphemy released on bail; for NGOs it is necessary to revise the law

Islamabad (Agenzia Fides) - After the resounding case of Rimsha Masih, a Christian girl accused of blasphemy and released on bail, for another Christian, who was arrested on false charges, the doors of prison have opened: Khuram Shahzad Masih was granted bail (100 thousand rupees, nearly a thousand dollars) by a judge of the Supreme Court, who ordered the end of the process within three months. As reported to Fides, the team of lawyers of the "Legal Evangelical Association Development" (LEAD), following the case, said that the 24-year-old "is physically worn out, but does not stop thanking God." His family (wife and three children) were able to embrace him after 11 months in prison. The young man was arrested on December 5, 2011 near Lahore (in Punjab), accused of burning pages of the Koran.

Another pending case, of the same kind is that of Martha Bibi, a Christian woman falsely accused of blasphemy: her next hearing is scheduled for November 3, for the last witnesses of the cross-question. Martha Bibi was arrested on January 22, 2007, and as Fides sources inform, in four years in prison, she has suffered mistreatment. In front of the perpetuation of injustice, as in cases regarding Rimsha Masih, Khuram Shahzad Masih and Martha Bibi, a group of international NGOs issued a statement calling on the government of Pakistan to ensure the rights of minorities and urgently to amend the blasphemy law, "a matter that remains crucial." In a joint statement sent to Fides, the NGOs "Minority Rights Group International" (MRG), "International Dalit Solidarity Network" (ISDN), "Franciscans International" (FI) and "Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network" (PDSN), ask Pakistan to repeal discriminatory laws and to protect the most vulnerable and marginalized. NGOs argue that Pakistan has not lived up to its commitments to the international community and the United Nations, especially on the "protection of minorities and the untouchables (Dalits)," since "the situation of minorities has worsened in recent years". "Discrimination and violence against religious minorities are widely distributed, while the perpetrators enjoy impunity," say the NGOs. "The blasphemy law - concludes the text - is the basis for institutionalized religious discrimination, as well as violence and oppression perpetrated by the state and by private groups." (PA) (Agenzia Fides 30/10/2012)