



ASIA/PAKISTAN - Appeal for a Christian sentenced to death for blasphemy, in prison for seven years

Lahore (Agenzia Fides) - The ordeal of Younis Masih, 26 years of age at the time of his arrest, a Christian sentenced to death for insulting the Prophet Mohammed, who for seven years has been in prison, is emblematic for all cases of false accusations of blasphemy that affect religious minorities: Younis is a man wrongly accused and whose life has been ruined, marked by years of imprisonment and suffering. Yesterday, November 13, the appeal hearing for Younis Masih's trial, sentenced to death on May 30, 2007 by a court of first instance on the basis of art. 295-C of the Pakistani Penal Code for alleged blasphemy against the Prophet Muhammad was held before the High Court of Lahore. The complaint against him was filed on September 10, 2005, and the day after Younis was arrested. Since then he has been behind bars and his family, wife and four minor children live the tragic absence of the father and struggle every day for survival.

During the first trial, Younis Masih tried to exculpate himself, declaring full respect for the Prophet Mohammed and stating the reasons for which his accusers had maliciously made false accusations against him. In fact, the complainant, the 27 year-old Muslim Hafiz Abdul Aziz, often went to the Christian colony, where Younis lived, to harass the Christian girls. Younis and other friends had warned him and had had a quarrel with him. The judge, however, did not believe his version and sentenced him to death. As reported to Fides, the Catholic lawyer and human rights defender, Naeem Shakir, has now taken the case and is taking care of the appeal process. At a hearing yesterday, the complainant did not appear and the Court established to set the next hearing for December 17, 2012.

"After seven years in prison and immense suffering for him and his family, we hope that soon the truth is established," lawyer Naeem Shaker explained to Fides. Thanks to Rimsha's case and new public awareness on the abuse of the law of blasphemy in Pakistan, he said, Younis Masih could also benefit from this. (PA) (Agenzia Fide 14/11/2012)