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ASIA/INDIA - Twelve convictions for anti-Christian violence in Orissa, but "much remains to be done"

Bhubaneswar (Agenzia Fides) - A court of first instance in Orissa sentenced to six years in jail 12 persons guilty of violence against Christian communities, during the campaign of indiscriminate violence which occurred in the district of Kandhamal (Orissa) in 2008. "It is the first step toward justice. People are still suffering, it is undeniable, but this ruling is a sign for legality, against impunity," comments to Fides Agency His Exc. Mgr. John Barwa SVD, Archbishop of Cuttack-Bhubaneswar. "Much remains to be done to ensure full justice. The victims are still waiting for adequate compensation. On the other hand I can confirm that the Christians of Kandhamal, where I went a few days ago, have totally forgiven their torturers. And, despite the difficulties, the hardships and poverty of present life, they live faith in joy," added the Archbishop.
According to local information sent to Fides, the judge also imposed a fine of 5,000 rupees for crimes such as arson and looting in the village of Jarkinaju, near Raikia. The court ordered that the failure to pay the fine will result in an additional year in prison. Ten other accused persons were acquitted for lack of evidence. Local sources of Fides recall that, in most cases related to the violence of 2008, the perpetrators have not been caught or, if they underwent a trial, were acquitted, even in many cases of murder. Human rights activists continue to report significant deficiencies in the application of justice. John Dayal, a Catholic activist and member of the Federal Commission for Minorities, confirms to Fides that "in spite of this judgment, the development of trials in the courts of Orissa does not inspire much confidence: many murderers are still at large, and a member of the Legislative Assembly is on the loose even if convicted, because the judges seem to think he is too important to be jailed."
In a note sent to Fides, the NGO "Christian Solidarity Worldwide" greets the ruling as "a step forward", but urges the government of Orissa to "fight against impunity, to ensure the rule of law, the essential foundation for peace. "
Violence against Christians broke out in Kandhamal district in August 2008, after the murder of Hindu leader Swami Lakshmananda Saraswati, carried out by Maoist rebels. In revenge Hindu extremists pursued the Christians, falsely accused of murder. It was the worst wave of anti-Christian violence in India's history after independence, resulting in 90 deaths and 56,000 displaced. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 29/11/2012)

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