



ASIA/PAKISTAN - Christian Missionary wounded: Taliban in Punjab are suspected

Lahore (Agenzia Fides) - Birgitta Almeby, the 72 year-old Christian missionary, victim of an assassination attempt on 3 December in Lahore (see Fides 4/12/012) is unconscious and is in the "Jinnha" hospital in Lahore. Pastor Liaquat Qaiser, spokesman for the "Full Gospel Assemblies of Pakistan" (FGA Church), the oldest Pentecostal Church in Pakistan, to which she belonged, told Fides: "She had a bullet in her lungs. She is in critical condition, as the doctors say, and still unconscious.

Every day I go to visit her, and with other faithful, we pray for her in her hospital room. We hope she recovers soon. She is in God's hands. " On the reasons of the attack, the Pastor said: "We do not know who the attackers are. There was no tension and there were no threats. The police are investigating and we are waiting for answers from them. We invite all Christians throughout the world to pray for Birgitta and for Christians in Pakistan. Let us pray for the terrorists so they repent and understand that they are playing with human life, which is the most precious thing in the world."

As reported to Fides, according to some local observers, the police investigation is focusing on groups of so-called "Punjabi Taliban." The attack could be retaliation because she had sided with Bishop Pervaiz Joseph and Pastor Baber George, both of the FGA Church, accused of blasphemy (see Fides 15/11/2011). The two had raised the issue of the misuse of the blasphemy law in a meeting with religious leaders. After the threats received, they had to move to a safer place with their families.

Fr. Bonnie Mendes, a priest of Faisalabad, collaborator of Caritas Internationalis and the Pontifical Council "Justice and Peace", explains to Fides: "We do not know who is behind this attack. But we know that Punjab has become the basis for some Taliban organizations that carry out terrorist acts like this. The Taliban are no longer only in Pakistan's tribal areas (FATA). There they train militants who then operate throughout the territory. Very often they target people who have a social impact on the community, to discourage the Churches and NGOs to engage in social work. On the other hand, Taliban groups seek international visibility, and therefore plan acts like the attack on the missionary, a foreigner and Christian. "

It should be remembered - notes Fr. Mendes - that , always on December 3, desecrating acts were carried out against a cemetery in Ahmadi (Islamic sect) in Model Town, the same area in Lahore where Birgitta's attempted murder happened. And the hatred of Taliban groups towards the Ahmadis is renowned.

Among the formations of the active Taliban galaxy in Punjab - also suspected of the murder of Minister Shahbaz Bhatti, a Catholic, a year ago - there are "Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan", "Lashkar-e-Taiba", "Lashkar-e-Jhangvi ", " Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan ", " Jaish-e-Muhammad ", " Jamaatul Furqan ", " Harkatul Mujahideen ", " Harkatul Jihadul Islami ". (PA) (Agenzia Fides 07/12/2012)