



ASIA/SRI LANKA - Radical Buddhists attack the churches: Christians call for religious freedom

Colombo (Agenzia Fides) – Bewilderment in the Christian communities in Sri Lanka after the recent incidents of violence perpetrated by monks and lay radical Buddhists: as reported to Fides, Christians renew the government's appeal to the defense of religious freedom. The community is shocked after the attack on a Protestant church, on December 9, in Weeraketiya, in the district of Hambantota, the southern province of Sri Lanka. A crowd of about a thousand people in the grip of a religious frenzy, among whom many Buddhist monks, stormed in the building and wounded pastor Pradeep. The crowd destroyed the church, destroying sacred furnishings, objects, parked cars. The attackers broke a police cordon. In fact, the day before the accident, a group of Buddhists and monks had visited the Pastor, warning him that without the permission of the Buddhist clergy, he could not carry out Christian worship in Weeraketiya, otherwise the church will be destroyed. After the Pastor's rejection, who invoked the constitutional rights, came the attack.

In 2012, the Christian communities in Sri Lanka, of different denominations, reported about 50 cases of attacks by Buddhists. Last September, the Catholic Bishop of Mannar, Mgr. Rayyappu Joseph - who had asked for a international investigation on the abuses committed by the government in the civil war against the Tamil rebels - was slightly injured in the attack against a Catholic church and Karusal, in the district of Mannar. In August 2012 some Buddhist monks occupied the premises of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the city of Deniyaya (always in the south of the island), transforming it into a Buddhist temple.

Over 70% of the 20.4 million people in Sri Lanka are Buddhists, and belong mostly to the dominant ethnic group, the Sinhalese. Christians are estimated at 8.4 percent of the population, and 40% of them belong to ethnic minority Tamils.

Among the violent Buddhist groups there is the "Buddhist Power Force" ("Bodu Bala Sena") that recently asked its followers to "defend the country by Muslims and Christians." The movement is the most powerful political party of Buddhist monks, the "Jathika Hela Urumaya" ("National Front of Liberation"), a partner of the coalition government. The party has already shown in the past to be very violent. A party militant assassinated Prime Minister S. Bandaranaike in 1958. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 15/12/2012)