



## **ASIA/INDIA - Christians: No, to death penalty and chemical castration for rapists; Yes, to sex education in schools**

Mumbai (Agenzia Fides) - "No" to death penalty and to chemical castration for rapists: is what the Indian Catholic lay groups say in the debate on the new law to prevent and punish the crime of rape, being examined by the Indian Government.

A new law for the crime of rape - in India scarcely considered for an ancestral culture that denies the dignity to woman - is on the agenda of the executive, after the sensational case of a 23-year-old girl, raped and beaten by a group of five young men in Delhi on 16 December, and then died on December 29. The incident has caused dismay at an international level, bringing to the surface the vexed question of the protection of the dignity of women in India, the theme has always been dear to Christians.

In a note sent to Fides Agency, the "Catholic Secular Forum" (CSF), a Catholic lay movement based in Mumbai, head of a platform for other Christian Associations, said that "death penalty and chemical castration are not the position of the Church." In a memorandum sent to the Indian government, the Christian movements urge the government to make sex education compulsory in public schools, in order to avoid the emergence of deviant sexual behavior in young people. To bring down the crime of rape, "we need to change the mindset of students during the formative years," it stresses and "puts an emphasis on equal dignity between man and woman."

As far as prevention is concerned, Christian Churches are asked to collaborate, emphasizing the urgency of "sexual education, respect of corporeality as a gift of God, to respect girls, from the early years of catechism, and for the pupils of Christian Schools." Lay movements have sent a letter to the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India indicating an educational program already put in place by the Archdiocese of Ernakulam-Angamaly of the Syro-Malabar Church in Kerala, requesting it be extended to all dioceses. We are talking about the sex education program "Enlight", aimed at pre-teens and teens who attend catechism classes, starting from 10 years of age. "It is necessary to do it, given the increase in cases of sexual abuse, rapes and crimes against women in Indian society," notes the CSF, stressing the need to educate children on these issues, "especially in light of the Internet and reports disseminated by the mass media." This commitment could have an impact because there are 15,000 among schools and educational institutions run only by the Catholic Church in the country, in about 200 dioceses.

As reported to Fides by the local Church, the educational program "Enlight" employs a staff of psychologists and Christian counselors. These, with visual aids, introduce children to the Christian vision of sexuality and the human body, the biological changes in the body of a teenager during puberty, sexual attraction between men and women. A specific segment, then deals with the risks and pitfalls of social networking, chat and mobile phones. As learned from Fides, the children who followed it, "were confused about concepts such as homosexuality, gay marriage, premarital sex, contraception, abortion, incest and rape." The ultimate goal of the program is to explain that sexuality is a gift from God (PA) (Agenzia Fides 08/01/2013)