



## **ASIA/PAKISTAN - In the fight against terrorism and sectarianism, government seeks Ulema support**

Islamabad (Agenzia Fides) – Praise is due to the Ulema (Muslim religious leaders) who have "faithfully taught and lived the message of unity, love and peace and condemned every act of violence in this country ". Following the slaughter of Shiite in Beluchistan – the latest in a long series which in ten years has caused in Pakistan, according to official estimates, 30,000 victims – the government of Pakistan, through the words of Paul Bhatti, Minister for National Harmony, ratified the alliance with religious leaders, firstly with Muslim leaders, in the fight against "terrorism, sectarian violence extremism and discrimination which has reached a peak in the history", causing the loss "of thousands of precious innocent lives". Fides was told that at national conference with the title "Living together with Diversity", held yesterday in Islamabad, participants included Pakistan's Prime Minister Raja Pervaiz Ashraf, federal ministers, members of parliament, as well as numerous leaders and representatives of different religious communities. The assembly affirmed the will to promote interreligious and intercultural dialogue as a means to build peaceful and harmonious co-existence in Pakistan and to counter "forces of violence and intolerance which persist, fed by poverty and illiteracy ".

Mr Bhatti, in his speech, a copy of which was received by Fides, denounced the existence of "a mentality which foments hatred", a mentality which is "anti-religious, anti-Muslim, anti-human, contrary to the idea of our Founding Father Muhammad Ali Jinnah, who dreamt of a nation in which people of all different religious traditions would live together in peace, without distinction, without fear ".

Noting the urgency of the moment, Bhatti called on all healthy forces in the country to work together to uproot this mentality which has weakened our society for too long ", impeding also economic development. This is the crucial challenge facing Pakistan – said the Minister – and it calls for "watchfulness, steady nerves, united and resolute action, in the present and in the future". To guarantee peace, stability, democracy, equality, justice and unity for all the people of Pakistan, he concluded, we must draft a "roadmap" to include the proposals of all religious leaders, scholars, academics, politicians and representatives of civil society. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 21/2/2013)