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ASIA/PAKISTAN - Petition to remove the death penalty under the law of blasphemy

Hong Kong (Agenzia Fides) – To eliminate the death penalty under the law of blasphemy and withdraw the charges against Sherry Rehman: this is what the petition launched by the Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), non-governmental organization based in Hong Kong calls for, which launched a petition, soon supported by other associations and organizations of civil society in Pakistan and other countries in Asia and the world.

As reported to Fides in a note from the AHRC, a starting point for the initiative was the decision of the Supreme Court of Pakistan to declare "admissible" charges of blasphemy against Sherry Rehman, Pakistan's Ambassador to the U.S., former Member of Parliament of the Pakistan People's Party who had presented in the past a proposed revision of the law of blasphemy. According to the AHRC, the Supreme Court did it "to gain popularity among Islamic fundamentalists."

The fact is serious and alarming, notes the NGO, because in this way it gives space also in the highest institutional offices to abuses of the blasphemy law. In addition, the Supreme Court - endorsing the accusations and therefore a trial against Rehman just because she had expressed criticism towards the law in a televised debate - lends itself to "suppress the freedom of expression in the country."

The note sent to Fides by the AHRC wonders "if the Supreme Court has been somewhat pushed against Ambassador Rehman or if it is a personal crusade." This is why we launched a petition asking the new Parliament of Pakistan, which will be elected in the coming months, to remove the death penalty from the law of blasphemy. On the other hand, the petition asks the Supreme Court to withdraw the charge of blasphemy against Sherry Rehman.

"The use of blasphemy has become a practice to limit freedom of expression and thought in society, and is now used by the courts to deny the people the right to discuss issues related to the misuse of laws by the fundamentalists," concludes the note. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 07/03/2013)

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