



ASIA/PAKISTAN - Alleged blasphemy: over one hundred Christian homes burned in Lahore and a Bishop wounded

Lahore (Agenzia Fides) - A crowd of about 3,000 Muslims attacked and set fire this morning, Saturday, March 9, to about a hundred homes of Christians in the district of Badami Bagh in Lahore, for a case of alleged blasphemy. The crowd also threw stones and injured several police officers who rushed to the scene to stop the violence. According to preliminary information collected by Fides on site, there are between 120 and 140 faithful burnt (men, women, children) who were admitted to hospital care. Among the wounded there is also Bishop Akram Gill, of the evangelical Christian community in Pakistan, who went to the area to try to stop the violence. Already yesterday evening, after the Muslim prayer, the crowd, "looking for the blasphemous" had put to flight 150 families residing in the neighborhood, with women and children escaping their homes to avoid being lynched. The case of alleged blasphemy concerns the Christian Savan Masih, called "Bubby", who the police arrested two days ago in response to a complaint under Article 295c of the Penal Code (apparently the so-called "blasphemy law"), which punishes those who insult the Prophet Muhammad.

As reported to Fides, according to local Christians the accusation of blasphemy is completely false. Chandar Masih, Savan's father, denied that his son committed blasphemy, saying that he deeply respects the Prophet. Bishop Sebastian Shaw OFM, Apostolic Administrator in Lahore says to Fides: "We condemn acts of violence of this kind and we call on the government to ensure the safety of citizens, and especially of religious minorities. There are people who want to take the law in their own hands and who believe they are above the law. It is a very sad incident that disrupts our city. Innocent people are not safe in their home. We express all our support and solidarity to the affected families. With Caritas we are working to provide shelter and accommodation. In this country there is need to work hard for peace and harmony. "

The Minister of Justice in the province of Punjab, Rana Sanaullah, said that he "sees no reason for violence, especially after the person accused of blasphemy had been arrested." He added that "acts of vandalism will be prosecuted," while "all those who have suffered damage to property will be refunded within five days of." (PA) (Agenzia Fides 09/03/2013)