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ASIA/PAKISTAN - After eight years in prison, a Christian sentenced to death for blasphemy has been acquitted

Lahore (Agenzia Fides) - Younis Masih, a Christian sentenced to death on false charges of blasphemy, in prison since 2005, was acquitted today, April 3, by the High Court of Lahore, at the conclusion of the appeal process. As local sources of Fides report, the court, accepting in full the request of the defense, reversed the judgment of the Court of First Instance, annulling the death sentence and imposed a fine of 100,000 rupees. The panel of judges, composed of judges Khaja Amtiaz Ahmed and Khalid Mehmood Khan said Younis Masih is innocent and ordered his immediate release. The appeal was presented in September 2012 thanks to a team of Christian lawyers and the support of the NGO LEAD (" Legal Evangelical Association Development"). The trial, says to Fides Mushtaq Gill, one of the lawyers, was followed by many Muslims, also present at the reading of the verdict. "We are grateful to God that, after so many years, justice has triumphed for Younis Masih. We are confident that the same thing can also happen for Asia Bibi," says to Fides lawyer Gill.
Younis Masih, was arrested on charges of blasphemy in Lahore on September 10, 2005. At the time he was 27 years old. After the charges, a mass violence was unleashed: 400 Muslims armed with sticks attacked and plundered the district of Chungi Amer Sidhu, where Younis' family lived. Younis and his wife Meena were beaten, more than 100 Christian families fled the area to save their lives. Younis had simply asked some Muslim neighbors to turn down the volume of music coming from their home. For this reason he had been falsely accused of blasphemy and the mosques in the area had called on Muslims to attack and burn Christian homes. The police, to appease the crowd, registered a complaint of blasphemy against Younis, and in a trial held in prison for security reasons, a court of first instance sentenced him to death in 2007. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 03/04/2013)

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