



## **ASIA/PAKISTAN - Attack on a Christian area, stones at a church in Punjab: the local community on alert**

Lahore (Agenzia Fides) - A fight between young Christians and Muslims, a Muslim mob that attacked the Christian area, burned shops, cars and motorcycles, stopped only by the intervention of the police, with a toll of six wounded, including an agent: is what happened yesterday, April 3, in Gujranwala, a town 80 km from Lahore, Punjab. As reported to Fides Agency by the Commission "Justice and Peace" of the Episcopal Conference, the area experienced hours of high tension, and Muslims threw stones and damaged the Catholic Church in Fracisabad, generating fears of mass attacks against Christians. The town of Gujranwala is known, in fact, for a serious episode of indiscriminate attack against the Christian neighborhood which welcomes more than 2,000 faithful families, which occurred in 2011, following a case of alleged blasphemy (see Fides 05/02/2011). According to local sources of Fides, today the situation is calm in Gujranwala but in the Christian community fears have not appeased, also due to the incidents of 2011. Muslim and Christians religious leaders today held meetings with the heads of the police and the civil authorities, to avoid the risk of a social mass clash. In the meeting security measures were adopted to avoid the explosion of unrest and maintain peace. Najam Sethi, head of the civil administration of the district, promised "severe action against those responsible for the clashes." The spark that ignited the violence was a dispute between young Muslims and Christians which degenerated into a fight. Also, the day before the accident, a Muslim man, entered the church in a neighboring village and set fire to Christian religious texts. In a note sent to Fides, Samson Salamat, director of the "Centre for Human Rights Education", notes that even in this case, as in the recent attack on the "Joseph colony" in Lahore and in many others, "an imam of the mosque instigated the Muslims to attack Christians." "The vulnerability of religious minorities, especially Christians – explains Salamat - is increasing day by day for the increasing level of intolerance in society. Intolerance can be controlled only with a clear political action which intends to eliminate the mindset that promotes hatred." (PA) (Agenzia Fides 04/04/2013)