



ASIA/BANGLADESH - A Bishop: "Society does not want a new blasphemy law"

Chittagong (Agenzia Fides) - "Many different organizations in civil society have launched public initiatives to say no to the new proposed law on blasphemy. In general people are not favorable, but only some radical groups propose it. As Catholic Church and other minorities, we appreciate the government's step: it said that it is impossible to introduce it": is what Mgr. Lawrence Subrato Howlader, Auxiliary Bishop of Chittagong said to Fides, while a new massive pro-blasphemy demonstration was announced by the Islamic radical groups for the 4 and 5 May. The proposal of law presents 13 requests, many of which, notice the defenders of human rights "are in contrast with the constitution of Bangladesh." Death penalty is proposed for anyone found guilty of blasphemy toward the Islamic religion; they want to prevent women from working with men; ban all cultural activities that defame Islam, to make Islamic education obligatory, all proposals that would lead to "a Talibanisation of Bangladesh."

The Bishop explains to Fides: "As Christians we are also contrary because one of the points of the law is aimed precisely against Christians and would like to prevent priests and faithful to go to the villages to promote social projects and activities." "But the government has made it clear that it will not be able to approve this law - he continues - and intends to maintain a fair approach towards all religions, otherwise the country would step back 60 years." According to the Bishop "human rights, religious freedom, rights and dignity of women are fundamental principles that cannot be stopped or denied by a law."

The Bishop resides in Chittagong which is the home of the movement "Hefajat-e-Islam," a new radical group that seeks to impose the Islamic law in the country, and is one of the promoters of the law. "They are small but powerful and seek to increase their influence in society", in a country which is 90% Muslim. "With moderate Muslims interreligious dialogue goes ahead, and in the social field we work peacefully alongside Muslim organizations. These extremist groups, however, refuse any relationship with us," he explains.

"We continue to pray and remain cautious. When there are demonstrations we keep far away from the hot spots, which could explode in violence," he concludes. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 19/04/2013)