



ASIA/BANGLADESH - Islamic radicals ravage Dhaka: Archbishop's appeal for peace

Dhaka (Agenzia Fides) - In the face of violence, "an effort of good will and peace, from all parts of society" is needed: is what the Archbishop of Dhaka, Patrick D'Rozario asks for in a statement released after the unrest that rocked the capital of Bangladesh, last night and this morning. An impressive demonstration of the radical Islamic movement "Hefajat-e-Islam" ("Protector of Islam"), announced in recent weeks (see Fides 26/04/2013) brought to the capital more than 200 thousand militants who devastated the city, clashing with the police. The toll is 29 deaths, including three police officers, more than 50 injured, several arrests. The demonstration had been authorized for Sunday 5th of May, but it exceeded the time limit and turned violent. The demonstrators attacked the headquarters of the ruling party, the Awami League, who set fire to more than 100 shops and at least 50 cars, carrying out acts of vandalism. The leader of the movement "Hefajat-e-Islam", Allama Shah Ahmad Shafi, was picked up by police and sent to Chittagong.

As reported to Fides by the local Church, the Archbishop of Dhaka issued a strong appeal for peace, asking that "we recognize the rights of every believer, belonging to any religious community" and renewing an appeal for cooperation "so that solidarity, harmony and peace in the country may be built. "

"We experienced moments of fear, but now calm has returned. The police allowed the demonstrators to leave the city. Many came from outside. Now there is a ban of organizing meetings and political rallies until midnight on Monday," says to Fides Benedict Rozario, a lay Catholic, Secretary of Caritas Bangladesh, based in Dhaka. The protesters "presented a document in 13 points - he explains - which wants the Koran and Sharia law in civil life, ignoring other faiths." It asks, among other things, the law of blasphemy, with the death penalty for anyone who defames Islam. "The government has expressed disagreement on some points, noting that, for others, the existing laws are sufficient. As Catholic Church we have expressed our concern. The government is doing its best to protect minorities, " he notes.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who has been leading a secular government since 2009, has promised that the government "will not allow any chaos in the name of Islam, religion of peace." Protesters criticize the government for a policy defined as "anti-Islam". Last month activists had organized a general strike and a rally of about 500 thousand militants, the largest political rally in decades. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 06/05/2013)