



ASIA/INDIA - No justice for the Christian victims of the massacres in Orissa: the figures of impunity

Bhubaneswar (Agenzia Fides) - Five years after the anti-Christian massacres that shocked Kandhamal district in the Indian state of Orissa, justice is still far and impunity prevails. In the "pogrom" of 2008, over 400 villages were "cleansed" of all Christians; more than 5,600 houses and 296 churches were burned, the victims were 100 (but the government recognizes only 56), thousands wounded, several women raped (including a nun), 56,000 men, women and children became homeless.

As recalled to Fides by the Catholic activist John Dayal - who closely follows the path of justice in Kandhamal - investigation was carried out late and in a superficial manner: only two inspectors and a small team of investigators tried to explore the vast number of cases of violence recorded. Moreover the police has not updated the cases in which the victims died thereafter as a result of injuries sustained in the wave of violence, in hospital or in refugee camps.

In criminal investigations in cases of arson, murder, kidnapping and violence, notes Dayal "there is grope in the dark." The activist reports to Fides the figures that give us the clear picture of impunity: 3,232 criminal complaints were filed by the Christians. The police accepted 1,541 but, nevertheless, did not lodge a "First Information Report", provided for by the Indian penal law. In fact, in a trial of continuous thinning of the cases prosecuted, only 828 complaints from individuals were actually converted into "First Information Report", which opens the trial in court.

In 327 cases the investigative work was declared concluded and, in the judicial trials initiated, 169 cases saw the acquittal of all defendants: around 1,597 were acquitted and - it should be noted - these defendants are a small number compared to the mass of people who actively participated in the massacres. The acquittals, explain sources of Fides, often occur because the key witnesses are threatened, intimidated or afraid. 86 additional trials saw minor convictions of the accused, not for the heinous crimes committed, but only for minor offenses, with imprisonment of two to three years. In another 90 cases, investigations are still in progress, but the more time passes, the less chance one has of collecting irrefutable evidence. (SD-PA) (Agenzia Fides 07/05/2013)