



ASIA/PAKISTAN - Threats to a Christian NGO committed to a transparent policy and the participation of women

Faisalabad (Agenzia Fides) - The women of a Christian NGO have received threats by Rao Kasif Raheem Khan, a Muslim candidate of the "Pakistan Muslim League-N" party for their campaign of education of voters with regards to a transparent policy and women's rights. In view of the elections on Saturday 11 May, the NGO AWAM ("Association of Women for Awareness & Motivation"), Christian-based, has promoted an awareness campaign suggesting voters to ask for "written commitments from the candidates." The campaign, conducted for five months, is meant to arouse, in particular the sensitivity on the protection of the rights and dignity of women. It was carried out in a widespread manner, in the territory of 42 female polling stations in four districts of Faisalabad, Punjab province, inviting women to express their vote: the territory, for the general election of 2008, the Female turnout at the polls was, in fact, less than 30%. During the campaign, citizen groups, for each polling station, visited local communities, associations, committees and families, condemning the practice of vote trading, buying or selling of votes and trying to mobilize women voters.

In the course of this campaign, two activists of AWAM, Qurat-ul-Ain and Shabana Bashir, have been heavily accused for their alleged "bad behavior" and threatened with "terrible consequences" by the exponent of the Pakistan Muslim League-N ". Nazia Sardar, a Christian woman, director of AWAM, told Fides: "We try to discourage the female electorate from taking part in political life, that would strengthen the culture of democracy in Pakistan." AWAM calls for action from the Electoral Commission towards parties and candidates that, in fact, oppose the culture of participation and promote vote buying. (SK-PA) (Agenzia Fides 08/05/2013)