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ASIA/PAKISTAN - New Violence against Christians in South Punjab: appeal to politics

Multan (Agenzia Fides) - More than 250 Christian families have been threatened and thrown out from their homes in the village 'Chak 31 "in Khanewal district, in southern Punjab for fear of mass attacks and arson. What happened in South Punjab "reflects the increase of violence and abuses against religious minorities in Pakistan" and "recalls the serious episode of the attack on Joseph Colony, a Christian area of Lahore, which happened two months ago," says a report sent to Fides Agency, drawn up by two organizations of the civil society in Pakistan, the "Human Rights Commission of Pakistan" (HRCP) and "Organization for Development and Peace" (ODP), engaged in promoting peace and defending human rights. While Pakistani politics is involved in the formation of the new government after the general elections, the two organizations have launched an urgent appeal "to all parties: politics, political parties, civil society, religious organizations, in order to operate actively to mitigate religious intolerance and promote social cohesion." The appeal was launched "in the interests of the country and not only for the protection of the rights of minorities."
Each of the families put to flight by Islamic extremists had about six people, therefore at the moment the faithful without a home are more than 1,500. The escape was the solution chosen to avoid a massacre. As reported to Fides, it all started with a provocation: About 15 days ago, some Muslims accused a Christian businessman, Asher Yaqoob, owner of a small grocery store, and his Christian customers of having disrespectful attitudes towards Islam, inciting the faithful of the nearby village, "Chak 30" (rural villages are numbered, and they do not have their own name, ed), all Muslims. Christians called the police, but a police officer, instead of protecting them, became the head of a crowd of 60 Muslims who began to beat anyone they encountered and started destroying homes and shops. Clashes followed and Asif Khan was hit by a shot and died. At the news of the death, the crowd threatened a mass attack and set fire to the entire village. The Christian families had no choice but to flee immediately. In the clashes 20 Christians were arrested by the police. The two organizations - the HRCP and ODP reported everything to the police in Multan and have asked the intervention of the civil and religious authorities to restore peace between the two villages. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 21/05/2013)

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