



ASIA/PAKISTAN - What does the future hold for Christians after the election? The problem concerning blasphemy

Islamabad (Agenzia Fides) - What future do Christians have in Pakistan? After the recent elections that brought to power the "Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz" (PML-N) party and decreed new Premier Nawaz Sharif, many Christians are skeptical. In a recent conference held in Lahore, a group of Christian leaders said that the faithful are concerned about their future. Among the main problematic issues is that concerning the blasphemy law, often used to attack Christian minorities. Nadeem Anthony, a Christian lawyer, says to Fides Agency: "The majority of Christians do not have high hopes in Sharif's future government because of his religious conservative approach and links with fundamentalist groups. Sharif was also in favor of the blasphemy law, which is a major cause of problems for Christians in Pakistan," he recalls. Until the blasphemy law is not revoked or amended – he notes - Christians will suffer as in the past.

The publication of a new report on the serious anti-Christian attacks in Gojra makes the situation even more serious, where 8 Christians were burnt alive, including two children, in 2009. The text of the Report, sent to Fides Agency, indicates some members of the "Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz" party that had just been elected to the government of Punjab province, where the massacre took place, as perpetrators of the massacre. The attack, which occurred on July 31, 2009, was a "mass punishment" with hundreds of Christian homes burned following the unfounded accusations of blasphemy against three Christians. The attack took place in the indifference of law enforcement and at the instigation of the political leaders of the PML-N. For Christian families there was no escape against the angry mob of about 7,000 people. In the following years, the government of Punjab took charge of rebuilding homes, but 50 families decided to leave the country permanently. Another major problem linked to the incident is impunity: only 17 people were charged with murder and 113 suspected of taking part in the massacre, but were all released after a few months: "The witnesses were systematically intimidated and silenced," said to Fides executive director Peter Jacob of the Justice and Peace Commission of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Pakistan. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 03/06/2013)