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ASIA/PAKISTAN - Christians oppressed by abuse and usury in Punjab

Lahore (Agenzia Fides) - A Christian, victim of violent Muslim moneylenders, another kidnapped and tortured for a whole night: are the two lastest "ordinary stories of abuse" reported to Fides by the Christians of Punjab. Both incidents occurred in recent days in Lahore, the capital of the province, currently governed by the "Pakistan Muslim League-N" and led by the Prime Minister of the province Shahbaz Sharif, new Pakistani Premier Nawaz Sharif's brother.

In recent days Aftkhar Masih, a young Christian was abducted in broad daylight, while he was working, by some armed Muslims, and by two police officers. Masih was held in solitary confinement, beaten and tortured for one day and one night, later identified by the police and released. The young man, who now has severe kidney problems due to the beating, had the strength to file an official complaint for abuse. According to the reconstruction of the NGO "Lead" ("Legal Evangelical Association Development"), the episode is a private vendetta by some young Muslims for past personal quarrels with the young man.

The second episode concerns Riaz Masih, a Christian citizen of Lahore, employed in the health care field. Riaz, a father with five children, had bought a television and other merchandise in a store from the Muslim Ali Asghar Rubani in 2009 for a value of 44,000 rupees (about 440 U.S. dollars). Despite having paid the full amount within the prescribed period, Riaz was forced by threats and intimidation to pay interests of about 200,000 rupees (about 2,000 dollars). This, unfortunately, is not the end of the story: in recent weeks a group of Muslims broke into his home and beat him, his wife and his children, demanding other 400,000 rupees (about 4,000 dollars). Riaz went to the police, who took no action towards the moneylenders. In addition, the shopkeeper reported Riaz for slander and one of his children was even arrested.

Christians call "to punish the guilty and to do justice to an innocent Christian family." "There is no doubt that Christians are victims of such incidents because of their faith and because they are considered poor and helpless, therefore vulnerable to any kind of offense," writes Ong "Lead", in a note sent to Fides. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 14/06/2013)

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