



ASIA/INDIA - Christians: no to the new anti-conversion law in Madhya Pradesh

Bhopal (Agenzia Fides) - Christians of the state of Madhya Pradesh (Central India) strongly oppose a measure that exacerbates the existing measures on the prohibition of conversion. The new law was approved by the executive led by the Hindu nationalist "Bharatiya Janata Party". The "Religious Freedom Act" has been in force since 1968 in Madhya Pradesh, which regulates the conversion from one religion to another. The new law provides that a person who wishes to change religion must inform the district magistrate of his decision. The new provision also obliges the priests who preside a "conversion ceremony" (ie baptism) to inform the state government a month before on the exact day, time and place in which the conversion takes place, providing for penalties if this does not happen. An administrative investigation of the police follows, to ascertain whether there are constraints. Christians fear that this will result in more violence against the ministers of worship.

"The legislation seems to leave many people with the false impression that the conversion is illegal in India and this idea is carried out by extremist groups who advocate the ideology of Hindutva with religious ferocity," explains in a note sent Fides the "Global Council of Indian Christians" (GCIC), which brings together Indian Christians of different denominations.

"This hasty decision is part of a plan that aims to create a climate of suspicion and hatred towards the Christian community, in view of the 2014 parliamentary elections", denounces the GCIC.

Rules such as this, continues the note sent to Fides, "have a negative social impact on Christians. This will diminish the valuable social work carried out by the Christians for the needy and the marginalized".

Anti-conversion laws are currently in force in six of the 28 states and seven territories of the Union. The laws, on paper, try to curb religious conversions made by force, deceit or flattery. According to the "Global Council of Indian Christians," in fact, the laws hinder the conversion in general and are manipulated by Hindu nationalist groups to hit religious minorities. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 09/07/2013)