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ASIA/KAZAKHSTAN - Petition for the release of a Christian Pastor jailed for false accusations

Astana (Agenzia Fides) - Immediate and unconditional release of Christian Protestant Pastor Bakhytzhan Kashkumbayev, imprisoned in Kazakhstan two months ago on the basis of invented accusations: This is what the international petition launched by the NGO "International Christian Concern" (ICC) calls for, an organization based in Washington (USA) committed to the protection of Christians and for the defense of religious freedom in the world.
The Pastor, leader of a community called "Grace Church" in Astana, capital of Kazakhstan, was arrested on May 17 on unfounded charges: according to the police it seems he attempted on the health of his community members by putting hallucinogenic drugs in wine used for Communion. As reported in a note sent to Fides by the organization "Forum 18" - which monitors the situation of religious freedom in Eastern Europe and Central Asia - the Pastor has been in custody for two months and is in a "temporary isolation" cell awaiting trial.
By defining the charges against him "baseless and even ridiculous," the ICC has launched the petition, sent to Fides Agency, demanding the immediate release of the Pastor, who is undergoing a "unjust imprisonment". The petition will be sent to the authorities of the Kazakh government and also to the Secretary of State, John Kerry, with the explicit request of a diplomatic intervention of the United States.
Already in October 2012 the police raided the "Grace Church", arresting some community members for questioning and launching strong accusations against Pastor Kashkumbayev. According to ICC, the charges were simply a pretext to intimidate the community.
In Kazakhstan - explains Forum18 - religious minorities, including Christians, face severe restrictions on their activities, and are often subject to heavy fines and even jail. One more reason for concern is the fact that the abuse of prisoners, especially if in prison for religious reasons, are common in Kazakhstan. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 13/07/2013)

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