



ASIA/INDIA - Children poisoned in a school in Bihar: the Church relaunches food safety

New Delhi (Agenzia Fides) - The case of the 22 children who died from food poisoning in a school in the Indian state of Bihar "strongly raises the issue of food safety and food quality and the urgency with which India has approved the Food Security Bill", the law on food safety, which once reaches Parliament in the coming weeks should be discussed and approved. This is what Fr. Charles Irudayam, Executive Secretary of the "Commission for Justice, Peace and Development" in the Bishops' Conference of India says to Fides Agency.

The tragedy of 22 children who died and 25 others intoxicated took place in a governmental elementary school in Marakh, in the district of Saran, in Bihar, eastern India. The school was celebrating the "Mid-day meal", national food program that provides for the distribution of free food in public schools. According to investigations, the food distributed was contaminated by pesticides, causing food poisoning and the death of the children, all under 10 years old.

Fr. Irudayam, expressing "sorrow and condolences to the children's families on behalf of the Indian Bishops", reminds us that "it is up to the civil administrations of the individual Indian states to monitor and ensure the safety and quality of food provided to government schools". The priest told Fides that in India the schools run by the Catholic Church and other Christian communities "place their attention to the food consumed by children, for quality and quantity".

The issue of food safety, he says "is a national issue of vital importance", pointing out that the episode of Bihar puts at the center of political debate the "Food Security Bill" (see Fides 06/07/2013). Fr. Irudayam concludes: "The Catholic Church fully supports the law, which plans to provide food to the poor and the marginalized, in order to eradicate the problem of hunger in India. The Justice and Peace Commission of the Catholic Bishops of India has been working since 2008 to support this bill, listening and speaking on behalf of the instances of poor communities in remote areas of the country. We now believe that the text of the law in Parliament needs corrections and we hope the Assembly will welcome our suggestions and those of civil society". (PA) (Agenzia Fides 17/07/2013)