



ASIA/PAKISTAN - "Technological Blasphemy": Christian couple arrested for insulting Muhammad via SMS

Islamabad (Agenzia Fides) - A new "front" of blasphemy seems to be opening in Pakistan after the life sentence of a man accused of having sent a blasphemous SMS (see Fides 15/07/2013), cases and complaints of blasphemy via SMS increase. As reported to Fides, another blasphemy case was registered against a Christian couple in the town of Gojra, in Punjab. Shafaqat Masih, 35, and his wife Shagufta Bibi were arrested by the local police because accused by the Muslim Rana Mohammad Fiaz for having sent a blasphemous SMS on the Prophet Muhammad. The police traced the SIM card and arrested the couple. A court of first instance validated the arrest, placing further investigation. Shafaqat Masih is disabled and his wife is a waitress in a local school. Their two teenage children are now being taken care of by the NGO "World Vision in Progress", which also aims to provide legal assistance. Gojra is a place which is "religiously sensitive" since 2009, when, due to a case of alleged desecration of the Koran, the Christian area of the city was set on fire, causing 8 deaths, destroying 40 homes and a church.

Currently the debate on blasphemy through new technologies, mobile phones, computer resources is alive in Pakistan. The Telecommunications Authority and the government are discussing technical solutions to the problem of the presence of blasphemous material on the Internet, on YouTube, on social networks. Many are calling for a law to limit and censor blasphemous Internet sites.

Another issue is the abuse of the law of blasphemy, sometimes used instrumentally to hit opponents. As reported to Fides, recently a delegation of 15 ulema in Karachi, of the Islamic school of thought "Deobandi," assured its support to the Christian community to propose an amendment to the blasphemy law: the goal is to stop their misuse against members of religious minorities.

Among the cases reported by Fides is that of a Christian 15-year-old from Karachi, Ryan Brian Patras, accused of having sent blasphemous SMS to some peers (see Fides 12/10/2012) and the victim of a plot. The boy and his family escaped by miracle from the murderous rage of a few extremists. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 23/07/2013)