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ASIA/PAKISTAN - Blasphemy: the imam who formulated false allegations against the Catholic girl Rimsha Masih has been aquitted

Islamabad (Agenzia Fides) - Bewilderment and bitterness in the Christian community in Pakistan, when on Saturday a court in Islamabad acquitted Khalid Chishti, the imam who had made false accusations of blasphemy against the Catholic mentally disabled girl Rimsha Masih. A year ago, in August-September 2012, the case had caused a stir in Pakistan and around the world and had been listed as an example of abuse of the law of blasphemy. The judge acquitted the Imam after 6 witnesses withdrew their declarations which accused him of plotting a conspiracy. Following the false accusations, radical Muslims attacked the Christian area of Mehrabadi (where Rimsha's family lived) and many Christian families had to flee to save their lives.
In a statement sent to Fides, the Christian lawyer Sardar Mushtaq Gill, director of the NGO Christian "Legal Evangelical Assistance and Development" (LEAD) said he was "deeply disappointed by the Court's opinion, given Chishti's evident and proven guilt". His acquittal, in fact, "will only generate new impunity and indulge those who continue to abuse of the law of blasphemy". The lawyer asks the government of Pakistan "to repeal all discriminatory laws, including the blasphemy law".
In cases of alleged blasphemy, the accused persons and their families - more so if members of religious minorities - are in constant danger of life, for possible extra-judicial killings. Currently, Rimsha and her family have found asylum in Canada, since they were, however, in danger. Besides in investigations and trials, the police and the judiciary suffer pressure from Islamic extremist groups and often protect or side with Muslim defendants. (PA)
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