



ASIA/AFGHANISTAN - Minors abducted and exploited for the practice of "Bacha Bazi"

Nangarhar (Agenzia Fides) - The sexual exploitation of children, in particular, the practice of "Bacha Bazi" (literally playing with boys), in which boys are "bought" to make them dance and have sex, remains one of the less talked about abuses in Afghanistan. It is an ancient tradition, with deep cultural roots, banned by the Taliban when they were in power, but is now re-surfacing. In a statement released by the head of Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), before the bacha bazi existed only in some areas while now it is everywhere. In particular, in the province of Takhar and in the north of the Country. The influence of warlord, rich merchants and illegal armed groups strengthens the demand, and poverty and the large number of displaced children determines the supply of exploitable boys. They are released at 18 years of age, when now their future is compromised. They are usually kidnapped or otherwise "captured" when they are still small and kept as "possession" of masters who deny committing sexual abuse, whereas at the end of the bacha bazi performance they are raped by groups of men. There are two kinds of boys: those who know how to dance well and are also used for entertainment, and those who do not know how to dance and are sexually abused. The activists report continuing cases of exploitation, and on the streets of Kabul, or via YouTube, it is easy to see DVDs of young boys dressed as women dancing at weddings or who are involved in other events. The religious leaders of the Country are working to combat this phenomenon. These perpetrators should be punished and information campaigns on the rights of children should be launched. The victims are generally reluctant to reporting abuse for fear of retaliation or being marginalized or killed. In areas of the district of Nangarhar there is no information or education programs on the subject and this is one of the main reasons why so many people remain involved. The practice of bacha is widespread in rural areas between officials and powerful militia commanders who are very rich and able to escape the justice system. However, it is also widespread in the cities among the elite that offers money, nice clothes, cars and anything that might make boys 'satisfied'. (AP) (Agenzia Fides 23/09/2013)