



## **ASIA/IRAN - Christians sentenced to 80 lashes for having drunk the Eucharist wine**

Rasht (Agenzia Fides) - A court in the Iranian city of Rasht sentenced four members of the "Church of Iran", Christian Protestant denomination, to 80 lashes each for drinking communion wine during a Christian liturgy. The four Christians, all Iranian citizens have 10 days to appeal. As reported to Fides by the NGO "Christian Solidarity Worldwide" (CSW), the judgment is motivated by the "consumption of alcohol" and "possession of a satellite dish". According to Fides sources, the measure is part of the crackdown on so-called "house churches" that are not authorized or tolerated, and against communities that celebrate the cult in the Persian language.

In a statement sent to Fides, Mervyn Thomas, Chief Executive of CSW, said: "The punishment inflicted on these members of the Church of Iran criminalize the Christian sacrament of communion in the Lord's Supper and represent an unacceptable violation of the right to practice their faith freely and peacefully.

We urge the Iranian authorities to ensure that the legal procedures of the country do not contradict its international obligation to ensure the full enjoyment of freedom of religion or belief".

Yesterday, October 23, a sensational demonstration for religious freedom was held in front of the notorious Evin prison in Tehran. As Fides learns, the American Christian Pastor Eddie Romero La Puente staged a protest demanding the release of five Christians imprisoned for reasons of conscience: Farshid Fathi, Iranian Christian Pastor; Saeed Abedini, an Iranian naturalized American who had set up an orphanage in Tehran; Mostafa Bordbar, a Christian activist; Alireza Seyyedian, a member of one of the house churches; Mohammed Ali Dadkhah, a prominent lawyer in Tehran, defender and promoter of human rights. Pastor Eddie Romero La Puente was immediately arrested and expelled from the country. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 24/10/2013)