



## **ASIA/INDIA - 54 Hindu extremists responsible for anti-Christian violence in Orissa have been acquitted**

Bhubaneswar (Agenzia Fides) - Acquitted for lack of evidence: for this reason a court of Orissa has acquitted 54 Hindu extremists responsible for looting and anti-Christian violence carried out in December 2007, in Kandhamal district in the Indian state of Orissa. As reported to Fides, among the destruction carried out there was also the devastation of a Christian Baptist church in the village of Barakhama and the burning of many Christian houses. The violence carried out was a sad omen and a "dress rehearsal" of the massacres against Christians in August 2008. Even for these attacks, most of the guilty go unpunished. During the trials, in many cases, the eyewitnesses recanted, and declined the most serious charges, such as murder, rape, arson.

According to the "Global Council of Indian Christians" (GCIC) "the evidence in the trial of the 54 men was obvious and indisputable". For this reason, in a note sent to Fides, the Council invites the National Commission for Human Rights to "take note of the large-scale of abuses suffered by Christians and to undertake new investigations". The GCIC notes "the total failure of the justice administration", recalling that, according to reconstructions already ascertained at the time, the violence perpetrated during Christmas 2007 was "perfectly organized and planned".

In October 2012 the Supreme Court of India also raised doubts about the "easy acquittals" in cases of religious violence in Orissa, which "spoiled the perception of a fair trial". Paradoxically, a month ago, seven Christians were instead sentenced by a court of first instance in Orissa, for the alleged murder in the summer of 2008, of a Hindu leader who was killed by Maoist groups. That episode was used as a pretext by Hindu extremists to unleash violence against Christians in Orissa, causing 100 deaths and more than 50 thousand displaced people. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 30/10/2013)