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ASIA/TURKEY - Protestant Christian Pastor arrested on false charges of human trafficking

Istanbul (Agenzia Fides) - The Turkish Protestant Christian Pastor Orhan Picaklar, 42, of the "Agape Church" was arrested by the police in the town of Samsun, on the Black Sea, on charges of organizing human trafficking and prostitution. The Christian community in Turkey, refer the faithful of the Turkish community "Agape" in a note sent to Fides, asks for prayers and support in order to prove his innocence. The allegations, it says, are entirely instrumental, as the Pastor was under observation for suspected "illegal missionary activity".
On November 11, the pastor was summoned to the local police headquarters for questioning in Samsun with seven other people. Accused of being involved in the business of human trafficking, he was held in custody pending a court to formalize the charges against him. The incident also caused scandal in the media. According to the Turkish newspaper "Milliyet", the charges are based on the testimony of a 19 year old Iranian. The Agape Church had provided accommodation to the girl along with other Christian refugees, supporting them in their studies and material needs. The Pastor and his congregation had faced false accusations in the past: the faithful define the accusations "attempts to discredit him" and "slander". As reported to Fides, Turkish Christians pray for the Pastor, confident that his innocence will be proven soon. False accusations may even have "a positive effect on the Church and on its purity of its testimony of Christ", it said.
Meanwhile, the church where the community "Agape" in Samsun meet was damaged by vandals. Orhan Picaklar has been in charge of the community "Agape" in Samsun since 2003. The congregation obtained the formal status of "association" in 2005 because, as other Christian communities in Turkey, the government does not grant official recognition of "church" to new communities. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 25/11/2013)

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