



ASIA/SRI LANKA - Indifference on behalf of the government with regards to the increasing number of attacks against Christians

Colombo (Agenzia Fides) - Hatred and violence increase against religious minorities in Sri Lanka, who make up 30% of the total population: is the worrying trend reported by churches and civil society organizations in the country. In particular, in the first 10 months of 2013, there were 65 incidents of violence against Christians carried out by violent Buddhist fringes, says, in a note sent to Fides, the National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka. This trend is confirmed by Navi Pillay, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, who, after a recent trip to Sri Lanka, noted "the growth of religious intolerance and the lack of swift action against those responsible". In this context, Christians are an increasingly clear and explicit objective of religious violence.

With a population made up of: 70% Buddhists, 12% Hindus, 10% Muslims and 7.5% Christians, Sri Lanka is often presented as a tolerant and multi-religious country. The government often highlights the fact that, in many cities, churches, mosques and temples are located next to each other without problems. In recent years, however, there has been seen an increase in incidents of aggression and violence for purely religious reasons. According to a report sent to Fides by the "National Christian Evangelical Alliance of Sri Lanka", (NCEASL) there were 52 incidents of violence against Christians in 2012, with an increase of 100 % compared to 2011. The number of cases has continued to increase: in the period from January to October, 2013, there had already been 65 incidents of anti-Christian violence. In particular, in the month of October, there were seven incidents such as: the forced closure of churches; acts of vandalism and arson against the homes of Christian Pastors; threats and beatings to Christian leaders.

The attacks – explains the report - are often perpetrated by Sinhala Buddhist monks who wish to "preserve the cultural tradition of Sri Lankan Buddhist" and do not hesitate to use violence to ensure that tradition. Crowds of Buddhist faithful who attack Christians and other religious minorities are often led by Buddhist monks that define Christianity "alien to Sri Lanka".

Among the most disturbing issues, with regards to this increase of religious intolerance, is the indifference of the Sri Lankan government that does nothing to protect Christians. Most of the attacks against Christians - said the Alliance –are carried out with impunity. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 06/12/2013)