



ASIA/INDIA - The Archbishop of Delhi stopped by the police: he was marching for the rights of the Dalits

New Delhi (Agenzia Fides) – His Exc. Mgr. Anil Couto, Catholic Archbishop of Delhi, was arrested today by the Delhi police along with other Christian bishops and leaders of other denominations.

This is confirmed by Fr. Joseph Chinnayyan, deputy secretary general and spokesman of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India. The Archbishop was participating, along with other leaders and many lay faithful of Christian churches, in a peaceful march to protest for the rights of the Dalits. The protesters had arrived in the area of Jantar Mantar and were heading towards the Indian Parliament. As Fides learns, the police beat the protesters with violence, arresting some of them. Among those arrested, Archbishop Anil Couto, the Christian Protestant bishops Alwan Masih, Roger Gaikwad and Vijayesh Lal, leader of the "Evangelical Fellowship of India", as well as the Catholic John Dayal, Secretary General of the "All India Christian Council". Christian leaders "will be released within this evening", added the spokesman. A complaint was however lodged against the Delhi police for assaulting and beating Catholic priests and nuns.

The march called for the repeal of the Presidential Decree of 1950 which legalizes discrimination, denying equal rights to Christians and Muslims of Dalit origin. The discrimination was extended to Sikhs in 1956 and to Buddhists in 1982. Religious minorities in India consider such measure "totally unconstitutional", "but the governments that have followed have turned a deaf ear", said Msg. Anil Couto. Even in the past there were peaceful protests, but today the police "acted brutally on defenseless protesters" say the Christians. In a note sent to Fides, the "Global Council of Indian Christians (GCIC)" is "shocked and dismayed". The Council recalls: already on November 2, 1997, some bishops were arrested for defending the Dalits.

Some political leaders like Jayalalitha, Prime Minister of Tamil Nadu, strongly supported the demand of Dalit Christians and Muslims by stating that "the issue cannot tolerate any further delay" and that it "should be brought to Parliament". (PA) (Agenzia Fides 11/12/2013)