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ASIA/SRI LANKA - Christians took to the streets for religious freedom: 18 Buddhists on trial for attacks against churches

Colomba (Agenzia Fides) - The Sri Lankan Christians, of all denominations, marched through the streets of the capital Colombo to protest against the attacks carried out lately by Buddhist extremists and for the lack of protection of religious freedom. As reported to Fides by local sources, over 2,000 faithful took to the streets in Colombo on Sunday. Attacks were carried out by Buddhists on January 12 against two churches and a center of Christian prayer. The center of prayer, belonging to the "Gospel Church" in Pitipana, near Colombo, was set on fire while the other two attacks - with damage to the furniture and stained glass windows and the burning of Bibles – was carried out against a church of the "Assembly of God" a "Church of Calvary" in the southern coastal town of Hikkaduwa.
According to the police, 24 suspects were identified and arrested. Among these, 18 will be tried by a court of Galle, near Hikkaduwa. The group includes 5 Buddhist monks.
Last Sunday in all Christian churches the demand for respect for religious freedom was raised. The Anglican Bishop Msg. Dhiloraj Canagasabey, speaking to the faithful at the Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Colombo, reiterated that it is the government's responsibility to ensure that Christian citizens have full enjoyment of rights and freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution: "Freedom of thought, conscience, religion and association should be the prerogative of all religious communities", he said, adding: "We expect the protection of the rule of law".
In a note sent to Fides, the "National Christian Evangelical Alliance" of Sri Lanka contains several minor incidents of the same kind, which occurred in January, such as threats, warnings, small acts of violence against priests, vandalism.
In a country where the large majority are Buddhists, Christian minorities are about 7%, Muslims 10%, Hindus about 13%. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 29/01/2014)

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