



## **ASIA/PAKISTAN - The Anglican Bishop of Karachi: "Christians in danger, police and judiciary in lethargy"**

Karachi (Agenzia Fides) - "Religious minorities in Pakistan, and especially Christians, have become the constant target of masses of extremists": says Ijaz Inayat Masih, Anglican Bishop of Karachi in a note sent to Fides, launching an alarm about the deteriorating condition of religious minorities in the country. "Over the last few years - he says - religious minorities have been targeted, their villages burned, accused in false cases of blasphemy, victims of intimidation, forced marriages and forced conversions.

"The Bishop recalls the case of the Judge of the High Court of Lahore, Iqbal Bhatti, who acquitted the Christian Salamat Masih, in a trial for blasphemy: the judge was killed outside the courthouse in 1996.

Blasphemy is a sore point: "When a Christian is accused of blasphemy, the people of a neighborhood gather to punish the culprit, burning him alive or lynching him. The police and the government have never punished such acts. The Bishop cites the responsibility of the institutions, speaking of "lethargic attitude of the police, public prosecutor and the judiciary". After the killing of Judge Iqbal Bhatti, the police often endorses the need to defend Islam, taking the side of the extremists or yielding to their pressure. The result, says the Bishop, is that there are many people in prison, on the basis of false accusations or hasty trials.

The Bishop points out a new, subtle form of psychological pressure: the extremists target Christians and try to extort money from them by threatening a fatwa against them, using the Islamic religion to blackmail.

Several cases of this kind have taken place in Karachi, defined as "a stronghold of Islamic extremists". Bishop Ijaz Inayat Masih concludes leaving open the question of whether the country wants to continue to keep in force the rule of law. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 13/02/2014)