



ASIA/PAKISTAN - "Who killed Sabir Masih?": Mysterious death of a Christian who was in police custody

Islamabad (Agenzia Fides) - "Who killed the Christian Sabir Masih?": Is the cry that rises from the Church and civil society in Pakistan that ask for an independent investigation and thorough autopsy after the mysterious death of the man, who died on 12 February, while he was under police custody. As reported to Fides, yesterday activists, civil society groups, Christian and Muslim organizations, priests, religious and lay people staged a massive protest in Islamabad, to express their outrage and to demand justice.

Sabir Masih, 32, came from a poor family who lives in a slum in Islamabad. He was caught by the police on suspicion of theft and imprisoned in the police station in Kohsar. After three days his death was announced, and his body was taken to hospital for an autopsy. The police version is "he committed suicide in the toilet: Sabir hanged himself with his belt". A joint statement by Christian organizations and networks of civil society in Pakistan, sent to Fides, says: "We strongly reject this blatant falsehood, because it is not physically possible in the given circumstances. We strongly condemn the killing. We demand justice and transparency". Asking for a new autopsy to be carried out in a private hospital, the activists also denounce the pressure on the victim's family on behalf of the police to bury Sabir Masih's body immediately.

"It is time to curb the widespread torture and police brutality, to end extrajudicial killings in Pakistan and uphold the rule of law", reads the note sent to Fides.

One of the leaders, the Muslim activist Tahira Abdullah who is working to clarify Sabir Masih's story, explains to Fides : "Where are the representatives of the citizens of non-Muslim Pakistanis elected to Parliament? Now they have to speak loud and clear, no matter what political party they are affiliated to. This is the time for us Muslims to show solidarity with all victims of torture, especially when they belong to non-Muslim minorities. The experience, in fact, teaches us that they are more vulnerable to discrimination, arrest, torture and extrajudicial executions". (PA) (Agenzia Fides 14/02/2014)