



ASIA/PAKISTAN - Dialogue with the Taliban? Peace march to say "no" to extremism

Faisalabad (Agenzia Fides) - Pakistan must wake up and seriously consider the threat posed by the Taliban militancy, formulating an appropriate strategy to ensure lasting peace. Dialogue must go hand in hand with a clear operational line of the security forces to stop the violence: is what the participants ask in a "March for Peace", within the "White Flag" campaign, launched by a wide network of associations of civil society in Pakistan. The protesters denounced the "inaction of the state and its institutions", which have so far failed to ensure the safety of citizens. As reported to Fides, the event, held recently in Faisalabad, was organized by associations such as "Peace and Human Development" (PHD), "National Minorities Alliance of Pakistan", "Association of Women for Awareness & Motivation" (Awam).

The "White Flag" campaign invites all citizens and institutions to hoist white flags on houses, offices and vehicles as a sign of peaceful protest against extremism and militancy. The march was attended by people from different communities, origin and religion, students, lawyers, trade unions representatives, political parties and non-governmental organizations. Everyone wore white hoods or carried white flags as a sign of the desire for peace.

Suneel Malik, Director of PHD, told Fides: "Dialogue between the government and the Taliban has so far been confusing and inconclusive. A complete and satisfactory solution to address the issues of Taliban militancy will only be found when all the insurgents are included in a platform for negotiation". A political activist, Robin Daniel states: "The State, by holding direct talks with the Taliban, seems to have recognized them as a legitimate entity. The militants want to drag Pakistan into the Stone Age, and want to impose the rule of terror in Pakistan". The director of "Awam" women's association, Nazia Sardar, said: "People are tired of hearing about peace talks with the Taliban: so far seven agreements with several other militant groups have not produced concrete results". Even for Shazia George "the Taliban should, as a pre-condition, lay down their arms, adhere to the Constitution of Pakistan, accept the rights of women and religious minorities in order to participate in negotiations". Political activist Ashar Iqbal adds: "Dialogue with militant groups should be kept within the parameters of the Constitution. Peace talks cannot take place next to acts of terrorism. Violence cannot remain unpunished. "The coordinator of another association, Iftikhar Ahmed, remarked that "the real battle is to change the widespread militant mentality in society, providing opportunities for people". (PA) (Agenzia Fides 21/02/2014)