



## **ASIA/PAKISTAN - Leading politicians reassure new Archbishop: "government will respect the rights of Pakistan's Churches"**

Lahore (Agenzia Fides) –Political leaders in Pakistan say the state will respect the rights, property and status of Pakistan's Christian Churches, according to a report sent to Fides. The promise was made to the new Archbishop of Lahore, Archbishop Sebastian Francis Shaw, OFM, recently installed in the diocese. The political leaders who addressed the new Archbishop included Saradr Ayaz Sadiq, chairman of the National Assembly, a Muslim educated at St. Anthony's High School in Lahore, run by the local Catholic Church. Sadiq, said "the education I received gave me self confidence, taught me discipline and how to develop my personality". He addressed in particular the question of the government's confiscation and demolishing of a local Caritas centre Gosh-e-Aman (meaning home for strangers) a case which shocked the Catholic community in Lahore (see Fides 11/1/2012). Sadiq affirmed the action would appear to have been provoked by persons anxious to acquire and sell the land on which the Home stood, and promised that the truth would come to light in the investigations taking place. Mr Sadiq, confirming his commitment to further social harmony, said "the Constitution of Pakistan guarantees equal rights for all the citizens of our country", including citizens who are members of a religious minority. Khalil Tahir Sindhu, government minister for human rights and rights of minority groups in Punjab State, of which Lahore is the capital, is a Catholic and he confirmed to Archbishop Shaw his personal commitment to "attend to the difficulties encountered by minority groups especially Christians ". Sindhu also announced that, with the case closed, the land on which Gosh-e-Aman centre once stood will be the site for a new girls high school run by the local Church. There remains the question of the return to its legitimate proprietor, the local Catholic Church, of Saint Francis High School in the district of Anarkali, Lahore: the school was nationalised by the government in 1972. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 26/2/2014)