



ASIA/PAKISTAN - Threats to judges and lawyers: two Christians accused of blasphemy remain in jail

Gojra (Agenzia Fides) - Two innocent Christians, Shafaqat Emmanuel, paralyzed, and his wife, Shagufta Kausar, accused of "blasphemy via sms" remain in the prison in Toba Tek Singh: The High Court in Lahore has in fact refused the request of release on bail, submitted by the defense lawyers. As denounced in a note sent to Fides by the Foundation "World Vision in Progress" (WVIP), that is following the case, "the judges of the High Court were initially convinced of what was said by the defense. But after pressure from Muslim religious leaders and the threats of extremists in Gojra, the judges denied bail, saying the case will be completed within two months. Radical Muslims had already threatened defense lawyers many times. Threatening letters have arrived to our NGO, to discourage us to defend the couple. In response to the threats, we have filed a petition to transfer the case to the High Court. But even these judges seem partial".

The risk is, according to the NGO, that the High Court imposes death penalty to a sick man and 35 years in prison to his wife. Shafaqat who is now in the prison hospital, due to multiple bedsores will soon need surgery.

"We do not know for how long Shafaqat will be able to survive in prison, without assistance, in his condition", notes the NGO.

"In Pakistan, terrible injustice with the misuse of the blasphemy law continues to be perpetrated. And the judges do not have the strength to restore justice" says to Fides Farrukh H.Saif, of WVIP.

Shafaqat Emmanuel and his wife, Shagufta Kausar, had been arrested in Gojra in July 2013 for allegedly sending blasphemous SMS text messages to local Muslims. The two have been subjected to torture by the police. Their four children now live with their grandfather. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 04/03/2014)