



ASIA/INDIA - Religious freedom at risk and violence against minorities, in view of the general elections

New Delhi (Agenzia Fides) – Tensions and violence against religious minorities in India increase in view of the general elections to be held in May: this is what is stated in the new Report published by the NGO "Christian Solidarity Worldwide" (CSW) titled "India: Communalism in an Election Year", sent to Fides Agency. The text emphasizes strong concerns regarding the states of Orissa, Karnataka and Rajasthan. In these states, the Report points out, there is a widespread practice of violence against religious minority communities, in addition to a robust system of impunity. For this reason, the NGO believes there is a need to monitor any "outbreaks of violence", especially in areas where Hindu extremist groups foment tensions between tribal communities. The Report also highlights the "legalized discrimination" against Dalit Christians and Muslims, the anti-conversion legislation, and the censorship imposed by the laws on blasphemy.

CSW is concerned about the increasing pressure on human rights defenders, including harassment and threats from Hindu extremist organizations. "To protect and strengthen the defense of human rights in India is a compelling imperative", says the text.

CSW also elaborated the Report after the visit to India of Heiner Bielefeldt, the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, who went to the cities of Delhi, Ahmedabad, Bangalore and Bhubaneswar.

The concerns for freedom of religion in India have received increased attention in recent months, after the outbreak of the violence against Muslims in Muzaffarnagar, in September, and the appointment of Narendra Modi - who in the past encouraged inter-community tensions - as Premier candidate of the Hindu nationalist "Bharatiya Janata Party" (BJP). In a note sent to Fides, the Executive Director of CSW, Mervyn Thomas, said: "In the year of the general elections, concerns over the violence against religious minorities have intensified. We are particularly concerned about impunity, after episodes of violence, both on a large scale and in confined areas". (PA) (Agenzia Fides 05/03/2014)