



ASIA/PAKISTAN - Death sentence for the Christian Sawan Masih: politics is deaf but dissent is increasing

Lahore (Agenzia Fides) - "The Christian Sawan Masih was sentenced to death on false charges of blasphemy. But what happened to those who were found guilty? This question is still unanswered. Religious minorities in Pakistan would appreciate an appropriate response from the government": This is what was said in a statement sent to Fides Agency by Fr. Emmanuel Yousaf, President of the "Justice and Peace" Commission of the Pakistani Bishops, commenting on the case of Sawan Masih, the 26-year-old Christian jailed for blasphemy. Fr. Yousaf notes that Pakistani politics has so far remained deaf to the appeals raised by minorities and civil society: "Out of 342 members of the National Assembly, only two women parliamentarians of the opposition, Shazia Marri of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), and Shireen Mazari of Pakistan Tehreek-i- Insaf (PTI), have had the courage to protest against the unjust sentence. The two have rightly called the fact that more than 3,000 Muslims, who burned the Christian district of Lahore and have been released on bail, 'a travesty of justice', while Masih has been sentenced to death".

The disagreement regarding Masih's sentence was also expressed by Saleem Khursheed Khokhar, chairman of the Standing Committee on Minorities in the Pakistani province of Sindh and at the head of the local branch of the "All Pakistan Minorities Alliance". Khokhar reports to Fides the "atrocities of radical Islamic militants who falsely involve Christian religious minorities in cases of blasphemy" and calls on the government to repeal the law. Khokhar calls on the European Union so that it "reconsiders services and trade relations with Pakistan", stating that, as a form of pressure, "these should be subordinated on respect for human rights, religious freedom and the security of religious minorities".

Even in Europe, the initiatives are multiplying: the Association of Pakistani Christians in Italy involved some Italian MPs, who have also been active in the case of Asia Bibi, starting a petition to save Sawan Masih, to be sent to the e-mail address: salviamosawanmasih@yahoo.it. "The international community cannot remain silent in the face of the umpteenth injustice against the Christian minority in Pakistan", said to Fides Professor Shahid Mobeen, Pakistani, professor at the Pontifical Lateran University. Even Adan Farhaj, president of the Federation of Pakistani Christian Associations of Italy, in a message to Fides experts to sign an international petition on the web (<http://chn.ge/1dGQjAQ>), hoping that it "can serve to restore justice and equality". (PA) (Agenzia Fides 04/04/2014)