



ASIA/PAKISTAN - Every year, thousands of Hindu and Christian girls kidnapped and forced into Islamic marriage: new Report

Lahore (Agenzia Fides) - Each year about a thousand girls belonging to Christian and Hindu religious minorities are kidnapped, converted and forced into Islamic marriage: this is the disconcerting phenomenon that occurs in the Pakistani society. A new Report sent to Fides Agency, prepared by the "Solidarity and Peace Movement" - coalition of NGOs, associations and institutions including the "Justice and Peace" Commission of the Pakistani Bishops - confirms the figures released in recent years by Fides Agency: an estimated 700 cases per year involve Christian women, 300 Hindu girls. And if these are the officially reported cases, "the true extent of the problem is probably much bigger, since many cases are not reported", explains the Report, sent to Fides, titled: "Forced marriages and forced conversions in the Christian community of Pakistan".

The text illustrates exemplary cases of Christian women especially in Punjab and of Hindu women in Sindh. We are talking about girls between 12 and 25 years of age, from poor families and low social classes. The few cases, because very often complaints are not filed for fear of threats, that come to court, the girls who are intimidated and abused, claim to have converted and married freely, and the case is closed. "Under the custody of the kidnapper, she may suffer sexual violence, forced prostitution, domestic abuse and beatings, if not human trafficking", notes the text. The Report describes the historical and social context of the problem and shows the appeal of the Christian community in Pakistan, that complains about "the non-existent legal guarantees, policies and procedures for the protection of human rights of religious minorities".

Fr. James Channan, Dominican, director of "Peace Center" in Lahore, told Fides: "The phenomenon has been verified. It is really very alarming and disturbing for Christians and Hindus, who feel very insecure and vulnerable. We have dealt directly with several cases of forced marriages: the young people belonging to poor social class and often rich Muslim landowners take advantage of such abuse. In Pakistan, it seems to me that Christians and Hindus suffer social, religious and political discrimination, which is getting worse". (PA) (Agenzia Fides 09/04/2014)