



ASIA/PAKISTAN - Young Christian killed because he refused to convert to Islam

Lahore (Agenzia Fides) - Easter mourning and pain for the Christian community in Lahore: Haroon, called Sunny, a young 22-year-old Christian was killed by a young Muslim because he refused to convert to Islam. The incident occurred on 16 April. Haroon, of humble origins, had recently started working as a house cleaner in the home of a middle-class Muslim family in Lahore. Here he worked alongside the Muslim Umer Farooq, a house guard. Umer began to mock Haroon's Christian faith every day, threatening him and inviting him to convert to Islam. He claimed that "embracing Islam is beautiful" and made him believe he would live in "luxury and would marry a rich Muslim woman". Haroon resisted and refused to abandon the Christian faith.

When Haroon told his father what was happening he advised him to ignore Farooq. On April 16, Farooq began to talk of religion again and to put pressure on Haroon. Then, nervously, he asked why the young Christian was adamant. Haroon said he was "a true follower of Jesus Christ". Farooq became aggressive and opened fire on Haroon, killing him with a bullet to the head. Later he began to cry out that Haroon had attempted suicide. The family called the police who led the guard in custody but a First Information Report has not been registered yet simply because the version of suicide is considered plausible. Local Christians then staged a protest in front of the police station. Umer Farooq is still in custody and his case is still under investigation.

In a message sent to Fides, Nasir Saeed, director of the NGO "CLAAS" (Centre for Legal Aid Assistance & Settlement), with offices in the UK and Pakistan, condemned the murder, recalling: "We read in a recent report that 1,000 Christian and Hindu girls are forcibly converted to Islam every year. Cases in which young Christians are forced to convert are frequent and if they refuse, they are killed or involved in false cases of blasphemy. In these cases, justice must ensure individual freedom and punish the guilty: this is the only deterrent. There is widespread religious intolerance and hatred against minorities at the basis of these cases". (PA) (Agenzia Fides 24/04/2014)