



ASIA/PAKISTAN - Escape from terrorism and extremism: the exodus of religious minorities has started

Lahore (Agenzia Fides) - Because of the spread of terrorism in Pakistan, insecurity, the very difficult living conditions, religious minorities have begun to abandon Pakistan. In the past year about 14 thousand Pakistani Christians have sought asylum in Asian countries but also in Western countries, in Europe and America. This is confirmed to Fides Agency by Farrukh H. Saif, executive director of the Pakistani NGO "World Vision in Progress", which works to stop religious minority discrimination in Pakistan and to promote decent living conditions.

Farrukh H. Saif explains: "The situation is serious: minorities, especially Christians and Hindus are being targeted for acts of terrorism, mass violence, abuse of the blasphemy law. Because of this situation an increasing number of families choose to leave Pakistan. Thousands of Pakistani Hindus seek refuge in India, while Christians, Ahmadis, Shias and other religious groups have reached East Asia and South Asia and have registered with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), hoping to be able to settle in a country where they can enjoy equal rights".

Saif tells Fides that "a flight of Christians began in 2009, when Christian neighborhoods and villages in Punjab were attacked by Muslim extremists. Hundreds of homes were burned and hundreds of Christians from Gojra and Korian took refuge in Sri Lanka, Thailand, Hong Kong and Malaysia. Also in March 2013 Islamic fanatics attacked the 'Joseph colony' Christian area in Lahore. According to our investigations, last year 14,000 Pakistani Christians sought asylum in countries of East Asia and South Asia".

"To stop the exodus, the Pakistani government should stop terrorism and provide security to Pakistani Christians and other religious minorities", notes Saif. "A few months ago - he continues - Pakistani authorities intercepted a thousand Christians who were traveling to Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore and Hong Kong and stopped them. In the second week of June, the Sri Lankan police launched an operation against Pakistani Christians seeking asylum, and arrested them: an action contrary to the rules and international principles. In fact, a host country cannot arrest refugees if they are registered under the auspices of the UNHCR".

The NGO "World Vision in Progress" launches an appeal to the international community to put an end to the suffering of minorities in Pakistan and in countries where refugees seek asylum in respect of humanitarian law and the rules of international law. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 05/07/2014)