

Day of prayer launched for Pakistani victims

Sara Angle Catholic News Service | Apr. 13, 2011

ROME -- Catholics and human rights activists have called for a worldwide day of prayer for Asia Bibi and other victims of the anti-blasphemy law in Pakistan.

The Masihi Foundation, a Pakistani group that works to protect minority rights in Pakistan and is providing legal assistance to Bibi, said the idea was to rally prayerful support April 20, the Wednesday of Holy Week.

Bibi, a Pakistani Christian woman sentenced to death for blasphemy, has been jailed since June 2009 and still awaits a trial date for her appeal.

The day of prayer "intends to bring into communion all believers and all people of goodwill in prayer and to light a candle, imploring God's salvation and the freedom of this woman and all who suffer the consequences of being falsely accused of blasphemy," Haroon Masih, the Masihi Foundation's director, told Fides, the news agency of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples.

Catholic leaders in Pakistan and human rights activists have said the country's anti-blasphemy law has been misused to persecute Christians and other minorities.

Fides reported that the day of prayer has received support from Bishop Andrew Francis of Multan, president of the Pakistani bishops' committee for interreligious dialogue, as well as from the Pontifical Mission Societies in Pakistan and from several orders of nuns in Spain and Italy who identify themselves as "Asia Bibi's guardian angels."

The Masihi Foundation is also involved with the blasphemy case of Arif Masih, another Christian who was arrested in Faisalabad April 5. The Masihi Foundation's lawyers have called for the immediate release of Masih, who is accused by a Muslim neighbor of ripping pages from the Quran and telling local Muslims to convert to Christianity.

News sources reported that many believe the accusation is based on a land dispute between the neighbors.

The Masihi Foundation lawyers told Fides, "They cannot detain him without even a complaint against him or without any court order."

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