

# **BANGLADESH: Rohingya Christian family kidnapped, minor converted**

Asia News (04.02.2020) – <http://bit.ly/2v4XIZF> -About 400 Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army militants destroyed the church and 25 Christian homes. Harassed women and girls; elders beaten. “We are Christians from birth. We ask to be recognized as such “. Pope Francis in Bangladesh met the refugees, “but we were not invited”.

A Christian family was kidnapped in the Kutupalong refugee camp in the Cox’s Bazar district, and an underage daughter was forced to marry and convert to Islam. Savel Islam Peter, one of the Rohingya Christian refugees attacked last week by Arsa militants (Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army) in the refugee camp, reveals this in an exclusive interview with *AsiaNews*. The kidnapping, he says, occurred the day after the attack on the camp on January 27th. The family, Saiful says, “was kidnapped for the faith. We are persecuted because we are Christians ”.

Saiful is a Protestant member of the Bethel Church Rohingya Christian Fellowship. He reports that the people kidnapped are: Taher, 55, his wife Kurshida, 32, and his daughters Mizan, 14, and Mariam, 8. Two days ago, he adds, “a Muslim neighbor told us that Mizan was forced to marry an Islamic extremist who lives near Nowkar camp, while there is no news of the rest of the family “.

He is hospitalized in a district mission hospital because of the injuries sustained during the attack. He was attacked because he filmed the homes of burning Christians on video. The police indicted him for filming the demolished houses. He said that "about 200 people from Arsa came to visit us carrying guns, knives, swords and iron bars".

At the moment, the families have been transferred to a UN camp. To those who question the presence of ARSA militants in the refugee camp, Saiful replies: "They really exist. We have encountered several in both the 2E and 2W camps. We have photos showing militant leaders carrying guns and knives. Many Rohingya Muslims detest them and I am sure they would be ready to testify that the members of ARSA are there."

The Rohingya are an ethnic minority, mostly Islamic, who have lived in Myanmar for decades. At the outbreak of the violence in August 2017 between army soldiers and the Arsa armed group, at least 740 thousand people fled Burmese territory and camped in Bangladesh. Saiful highlights: "There is a hate speech that surrounds us, according to which for the Rohingya there is no other religion than the Islamic one. In reality, the Rohingyas were Hindus for a long time."

On the attack on Christian families, the man says: "The Rohingya Christian women and children were beaten terribly. Many young girls were sexually harassed in the nights. During attack, attackers touch private part of women. Their married gold and earrings have snatched away, so many women got permanent damage in the ear of fingers. My elderly people and man have cut with swords on the shoulders, backs or in the arms " "We have videos that demonstrate everything – he continues – at least 400 people attacked us. They stole all

our belongings from homes, destroyed the church, took computers, projectors and other material for a value of 200 thousand taka [2,130 euros, ed.]”.

At least 1,500 Rohingya Christians live in Bangladesh, who have arrived in various migratory waves since 1991. The only church for them is located in Camp 2, block 1, of Kutupalong. All “are Christians from birth, and not converted to Christianity after arriving in Bangladesh, as one would like to believe”. Saiful denounces that “as early as last May, between 10 and 13, the criminals had destroyed the church. They returned between January 25 and 27 and demolished the church and 25 houses again.”

“For years – Saiful notes – we have been asking to be recognized as Christians by the Muslim majority Rohingya. We hope that card. Patrick D’Rozario, head of the country’s Catholic bishops, help us get the kidnapped back. In 2017, we learned that Pope Francis came to Bangladesh and met Rohingya refugees. However, no one invited us to that meeting.”