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Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka: last warning (so far)

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The bloody Easter attacks in Sri Lanka confirm the extent to which the spread of terrorism has become a major feature of the international situation and demands the affirmation of active solidarity with all the communities that fall victim to it.

On the morning of Sunday 21 April 2019 suicide bombers blew themselves up in three luxury hotels in Colombo, Sri Lanka's capital, and three Christian churches where Easter Mass was being celebrated. At the last count (reviewed downwards, since some bodies had been counted twice), 253 people were killed, including many children and about forty foreigners. The vast majority of victims were Sri Lankan. Entire families have been decimated. The number of wounded is said to be about 500.

The attacks targeted the economy of the island (via the tourism industry), but they were primarily anti-Christian. They were committed by a local Islamist organization that has recently strengthened and "radicalized", the National Tawheed Jamaath (NTJ). The latter received training and international logistical support, presumably provided by ISIS, who claimed responsibility for the operation. From Afghanistan to Mindanao (Philippines), Asia has become the main region of expansion for Islamic State, initially established in Iraq and Syria.

The radicalization of the NTJ is fuelled by the economic crisis that is affecting the island, but also by a feeling of marginalization of the Muslim population, a collateral victim of the war between the government and the armed organization of the Tamil Tigers (LTT) who demanded the creation of a state in the north and east of the country - and who attacked the Muslims living in the east. The government broke the fighting capacity of the LTTs in 2009 at the cost of a terrible massacre of civilians. After the Tamils, it is the Muslim minority that has become the target of Sinhala chauvinism, subject to daily harassment.

The regime has fostered the development of extreme right-wing fundamentalist Buddhist organizations that bear a great responsibility in the spiral of violence on the island. It has lost interest in the fate of Muslim or Christian minorities (whether Sinhalese or Tamil) and has not protected them. As a result, the transformation of NTJ went unnoticed. Similarly, busy with the war of leaders between the Prime Minister and the President, it did not even take into account information provided by the Indian intelligence service that predicted imminent attacks on churches. Criminal irresponsibility.

From the Middle East to Asia, Christian communities are regularly targeted by deadly attacks, even forced into exile, eradicated. At the international level, most of the victims of terrorism remain Muslim; but they mostly fall under the indiscriminate blows of Islamist organizations against the backdrop of the Iran/Saudi Arabia conflict. Riyadh's responsibility in the attacks in Sri Lanka, as in many other places, is real, because, through petrodollars, it imposes, against the traditions of local Islam, Wahhabi obscurantism. This does not prevent Paris or Washington from making Saudi Arabia a strategic ally.

The Easter attacks also challenge us. It is not just now that Christians have been targeted, we have written about it, but we have developed no tradition of solidarity with them, unlike others (Muslims, Jews and so on). A culpable myopia. The word "anti-Christian" (or any other equivalent) has not entered the lexicon of the left - which lets the right freely do the opposite, often prioritizing its solidarity with Christian communities elsewhere, claiming them as "ours", at the mortal risk of presenting them as foreigners in their own country.

Religious or (ethno-) nationalist fundamentalisms, these "factories of hatred", constitute formidable weapons of destruction of social cohesion and popular solidarity. In Sri Lanka, in a country traumatized by war ending only 10

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years ago with a huge massacre, the danger is now to see the entire Muslim community held collectively responsible for the crimes of jihadists - this is precisely one of the objectives pursued by the latter. After this bloody Easter Sunday, the police protected churches and mosques, but the regime is (very) authoritarian, while the security state, Buddhist theofascism and Sinhala chauvinism are on the offensive. Muslims and Christians must be jointly defended.

Many interfaith manifestations of solidarity have taken place in Sri Lanka itself, an antidote to hatred. The minimum we can do is to show them ours. Collectively. In France, there are some parties (like the NPA) and associations (like the FUIQP) which have equally denounced all forms of racism. Too often however, what seems distant is ignored and what seems near becomes the source of petty quarrels. The victims of terrorism deserve better.

PS:

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