

Pakistan to review list of obscene words that includes 'Jesus Christ'

VATICAN CITY - A Pakistani telecom agency backed off a ban on "obscene" words - including the name Jesus Christ - in text messages on mobile phones.

The Pakistan Telecommunication Authority released a list of more than 1,600 words that it considered to be "vulgar, obscene or harmful" and ordered phone companies to block text messages containing those words.

However, an official from the authority told Agence France-Presse that it would review and shorten the list before issuing the ban. It did not list a time frame.

Father Nadeem John Shakir, secretary of the commission for social communications for the Pakistani bishops' conference, told the Vatican missionary news agency Fides Nov. 21 that "the Catholic Church of Pakistan will put pressure on the government to eliminate the name of Christ from the prohibited list."

"We understand the desire to protect the minds of young people but why include the name of Christ? What is obscene? Banning it is a violation of our right to evangelize and hurts the feelings of Christians," Father Shakir told Fides.

"If the ban is confirmed, it would be a black page for the country, a further act of discrimination against Christians and an open violation of Pakistan's constitution," he said.

In response to the outrage over the ban, the telecommunications agency cited Article 19 of the Pakistani constitution, which states that freedom of speech and expression is "subject to any reasonable restrictions imposed by the law, in the interest of the glory of Islam."