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ASIA/INDONESIA - "Everyone must respect the Constitution": Bishop of Bandung tells Fides about ruling supporting construction of a church

Bandung (Agenzia Fides) – "We accept with serenity the verdict of the Court, in favor of the construction of the Church of Saint Mary, in the Diocese of Bandung, without claiming victory. We are now awaiting the motions of the local government of West Java, that within two weeks may submit an appeal to the High Court. If the appeal is not presented, we will resume work on building the new church. We are calm and we intend to act within the limits and rights marked by the Indonesian Constitution." This is what Fides was told by Bishop Johannes Pujasumarta, Bishop of Bandung and Secretary of the Indonesian Bishops' Conference.
In an interview with Fides, the Bishop commented on the decision of a court in the province of West Java. The Court ruled in favor of the local Church in the controversy over building a new church in the District of Purwakarta, an hour from Bandung. The church had already obtained permission for the building and had started work, but last year the protests of radical Islamist groups forced the workers to stop work while the local government, following pressure, withdrew the license to build. In November 2009, the Church of Bandung decided to appeal through the courts, and now they have obtained a favorable verdict.
Bishop Pujasumarta tells Fides: "Anything could still happen. We will also wait to see the reactions of fundamentalist groups that have stopped the work and with their protests led the government to withdraw the building permits that were already granted. There may be drastic reactions, but we are prepared for every eventuality. We will respond with prayer and with non-violent gestures, such as fasting and silent meditation, which are the weapons of the Christian in this time of Lent."
The Bishop concluded: "We want to live and help safeguard social and interfaith harmony. But we are well aware that Indonesia has a constitution that recognizes our rights and that all are bound to respect them, even the small radical Muslim groups."
Bishop Pujasumarta, in a recent meeting between religious leaders and members of the Indonesian parliament, asked the civil authorities to guarantee rights and religious freedom in Indonesia, indicating the presence of Muslim extremist groups that continue to attack Christian churches, to block construction works or to close down prayer halls. The prelate recalled the existence of two ministerial decrees, the No.8 and No.9 of 2006, which give local authorities in the Indonesian provinces the task of ensuring interfaith harmony. But oftentimes,"many local authorities are easy targets for extremist Muslim groups and they yield to their pressure, accommodating to their demands," said the Bishop, as occurred in the Church of Saint Mary, the Diocese of Bandung. The Bishop lamented the lack of enforcement of the two ordinances and asked the Parliament to guarantee their implementation. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 17/2/2010)

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