



## **ASIA/INDONESIA - Obama's visit, an opportunity for Indonesian Islam**

Jakarta (Agenzia Fides) – Barak Obama's visit to Indonesia is a great opportunity to prove that "Islam can coexist and contribute to a pluralistic society" and that "the United States and the Islamic community in the world are not enemies." Obama "has learned from the Indonesian multiculturalism and he wants to practice it today, as President of the United States." This is what Fides has learned from Christian and Muslim leaders in Indonesia, on the eve of departure of the President of the United States, who will be in Indonesia from March 23-25. Indonesia is the country where Obama lived as a child (from 1967 to 1971). The nation is preparing for his arrival with welcome ceremonies and some sporadic protests.

The Christian community considers Obama's visit to Indonesia as a good for the country, as in addition to strengthening diplomatic ties between the two countries, the visit seems to be a friendly gesture of the United States for Islam. In an interview with Fides, the Bishop of Palangkaraya (Indonesian Borneo), Bishop Aloysius M. Sutrisnaatmaka, Chairman of the Liturgical Commission of the Bishops' Conference, said: "Besides being the President of the United States, Obama is also a Nobel Peace Prize winner. His visit to a predominantly Muslim country is also a way to demonstrate his commitment to bring peace and affirm that Islam is not the enemy of the United States nor is the United States an enemy of Islam. Obama also carries the message that Islam can coexist and contribute to a pluralistic society, not only in our country - where many religious communities co-exist and different cultures - but also in other parts of the world. Obama's visit is an opportunity to reaffirm that in Islam there are positive values, while in recent years has prevailed at the international level, the idea of Islam as a religion inspired by violence."

According to Prof. Azyumardi Azra, one of the best known and most prestigious Islamic intellectuals in Indonesia, formerly the National Islamic University Rector - the "UIN Syarif Hidayatullah" in Jakarta - the protests of some Indonesian Muslim organizations, such as Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), should not be considered a barrier in the path of rapprochement. Azyumardi looks at Obama's visit as an important step at the diplomatic level, as well as for Indonesian Islam. He told Fides: "We had been expecting a visit from Obama for a long time, after he made trips to other Islamic countries, like Egypt. It is a very important fact...it is a strong sign of friendship. Obama, who has learned multiculturalism in Indonesia, now intends to practice it as President of the United States. We hope that this is a first step towards building a relationship with the Islamic culture based on mutual respect. For this reason, Islam should welcome him with esteem and respect."

Obama will meet with the political authorities and some Muslim leaders in Indonesia. Hasyim Muzadi, head of the "Nahdlatul Ulama" and Din Sjamsuddin, head of the "Muhammadiyah," the two main Islamic organizations in Indonesia, have urged the faithful to welcome Obama as a "welcomed guest," deploring the attitude of rejection of other Muslim groups. (EV/PA) (Agenzia Fides 18/3/2010)