



ASIA/THAILAND - "A hidden agenda meant to spread chaos in the country..." warns Archbishop of Bangkok

Bangkok (Agenzia Fides) – Peace, negotiations, prayer for the good of the country are the "keywords" to resolving the current crisis in Thailand. This is what Fides learned in an interview with Archbishop Francis Xavier Kriengsak Kovithavanij of Bangkok, who warns of "dark forces who want to plunge the situation into chaos." The demonstrations of the "Red Shirts" have been lasting more than a month and the government has declared a state of emergency, sending in the army. In last Saturday's unrest, there 21 reported dead and 858 wounded from the clashes between demonstrators and soldiers. Today, the Red Shirts have staged a "great parade" through the streets of the capital, making a symbolic procession with the coffins of the fallen, to create a sensation and dismay among the public.

The Archbishop, expressing concern about the evolution of violent demonstrations, told Fides: "The situation is very delicate. There is a clear political split between the 'Red Shirts' calling new elections and the government, which is still legally recognized and lawfully in office. Negotiations are underway and we hope it all goes successfully. The fact is that there is a hidden political agenda behind these demonstrations. The general view is that the current pressures are the work of former Premier Thaksin Shinawatra, who finances the demonstrators." "During this period of confusion and social policy - continues the Prelate – other groups come to sow violence. Those who attacked military installations with grenades intended to worsen the situation ... but to what end? We certainly must not go into a civil war, which would be a national tragedy. Hopefully, things will evolve peacefully. We ask all parties to reject violence and respect the law of the land."

The Bishops, the Archbishop notes, "for more than a month now have called the faithful on to prayer. Our prayer continues, we ask for God's grace and peace upon Thailand at all the Masses that are celebrated in the Archdiocese." Even Buddhist religious leaders pray and spread words of peace, which we hope will have success."

The "Red Shirts" have demanded the intervention of the 82nd King Bhumibol - much loved by people, but in poor health - to end the crisis. "Someone will inform the King that his children were killed in the streets," Jatuporn Prompan, a leader of the protesters, told the crowd, calling for intervention of the King "to avoid further deaths." But to solve the crisis and achieve social peace, "the key is the former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra," said Boonjong Wongtrairat, number two in the coalition party (the "Bhumjaithai Party") and Deputy Interior Minister, stressing "the urgent need for the former Premier's role in mediating between the current government and the Red Shirts." (PA) (Agenzia Fides 12/4/2010 lines 28 words 289)