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ASIA/THAILAND - President of Bishops' Conference proposes uniting religious leaders for mediation effort

Bangkok (Agenzia Fides) – At this tragic point, while the sides have lost mutual trust and launch serious accusations at each other, while violence overtakes the streets of Bangkok, with deaths and injuries, "an intervention of religious leaders might help to explore new avenues of dialogue and mediation, and provide a peaceful solution to the crisis," Fides was told by Archbishop Louis Chamniern of Thare and Nonseng, President of the Bishops' Conference of Thailand. It would be a last chance before the "civil war" that threatens to disfigure the nation: the leaders of different religious communities in Thailand (Buddhists, Christians, and Muslims) - who already met a month ago, publicly expressing support for the common initiatives for dialogue and reconciliation - have the confidence, credibility, and esteem of the population that today could be very useful in resolving the deadlock and avoiding more violence."
The Archbishop said, in an interview with Fides, "We cannot stress enough the point that the only way is dialogue: we need to lay down arms and abandon the violent solution to the crisis. I fear that the country is at the beginning of a civil war that, if it is not stopped, will become a catastrophe."
"Among the parties - he notes - there has been a clear misunderstanding. Both the factions are determined to win and seek to defend their interests, without considering the rest of the Thai population and the common good. The government accuses the leaders of the 'red' protest to be 'enemies of the crown' and 'traitors,' while leaders of the 'red' protest accuse the government of having killed defenseless Thai citizens. The Executive Branch should exert more patience and even explore new avenues of dialogue and mediation."
At this stage, the contribution of religious leaders may be decisive, says Archbishop Chamniern Bishop: "This is why we religious leaders are willing to offer our assistance and we could play a mediating role between the parties, if we were involved. The population, at this time, places greater confidence in religious leaders than in political leaders. And we would be ready to take the field and start working for the good of the country to stop further bloodshed.
The Archbishop is worried about the situation and appeals to the Universal Church: "I see the people, at this stage of our tragic history, discouraged and passive. There is much fear. The 'Land of Smiles' seems to have become a 'country of pain.' Today we all suffer together and, at this moment, it is like being in a tunnel where you do not yet see a way out. As the Catholic Church, we continue to pray daily and in Sunday Masses for peace in Thailand. Today we ask the help and the prayer of the Universal Church to bring back peace and reconciliation to our beloved nation." (PA) (Agenzia Fides 15/05/2010)

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