



## **ASIA/INDONESIA - Weak government leaving room for Islamic extremist groups**

Jakarta (Agenzia Fides) - "Radicals of the FPI ("Front Pembela Islam," Islamic Defense Front), are taking advantage of the weak central government, rocked by scandals of corruption and misrule, which have affected political, financial, military leaders. This explains how militant Islamists have once again reared their heads and gained ground. The government itself fears them. The radicals also count on support from the political world," Fides learns from Fr. Emmanuel Harja, priest of the Diocese of Jakarta and Director of the Pontifical Mission Societies in Indonesia, who commented on the latest developments of the "Islamic campaign against the Christianization of the country," launched in Bekasi (a town near Jakarta) by various radical Islamic groups, led by the FPI (see Fides 30/6/2010). Fr. Emmanuel says: "It's often violent militants who openly encourage hostility against all Christians. We ask the government to stop them and ensure freedom of religion and faith in all religious communities. It's a matter of justice and respect for fundamental rights."

The alarm for the campaign of Islamic groups has now reached the "Crisis Center" of the Bishops' Conference. Fr. Ignazio Smaritano, SJ, Director of the Center, tells Fides: "The Church's line is this: not to react on her own to the provocation by radicals, but to always seek ecumenical fellowship and full harmony and cooperation of other religious leaders, starting with Muslims. Also, we always try to act in cooperation with all other civil society organizations, with organizations for the protection of human rights and political parties that defend democracy. Everyone, at this time, is condemning the sectarian approach of the FPI, renewing the assumption that Indonesian society is based on the motto 'unity in diversity', expressing loyalty to the five principles of Pancasila which are the basis of civil society."

"It should be noted - continues Fr. Smaritano - that at the root of the matter it seems to me that there is a problem that affects the relationship between Islamic groups and Protestant Christian groups, within their spheres of action and influence. At the basis of it is the question of human relationships and respect for others." "Every religious community - the Jesuit tells Fides - should not propagate their faith so fanatically. This approach only leads to a reaction of fanaticism in other communities. It's a vicious circle that we must emerge from. Today, the important thing is to let tensions cool down and hope that through common sense, everything can get back on the track of peaceful coexistence."

In the meantime, there is a rising opposition among Indonesians towards the FPI. In addition to several civic organizations, a coalition of members of different parties in the House of Representatives issued a formal request to President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono to stop the action of the FPI and declare it an "illegal organization." The FPI, it emphasizes, is involved in too many violent incidents and there is overwhelming evidence for its indictment. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 07/01/2010)