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ASIA/BHUTAN - Indian missionaries and sisters "ready to bring the Gospel to Bhutan"

Chennai (Agenzia Fides) – Much attention, curiosity and interest has been attracted within the missionary world, especially in India, regarding the news of the possible opening of the Buddhist kingdom of Bhutan to the Christian faith. Currently in Bhutan only the Buddhist and Hindu religions are permitted, but in recent weeks, Chhoedey Lhentshog, Government representative for the management of religious organizations, said that Christian groups may officially register with the authorities. Catholic missionaries and sisters have told Fides that "they are ready to go and start a community of faith in the Country, to carry the seed of the Gospel even there."
Father Arul Raj, a missionary from the Oblates of Mary Immaculate (OMI), who lives in Chennai (in Tamil Nadu) is the founder of two religious orders: one female, the "Society of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate (DMI), and one male, the "Society of the Missionaries of Mary Immaculate" (MMI). The two orders, from southern India, have opened several communities in another five states in northern India, also on the border with Nepal and Bhutan. Father Arul told Fides: "We are ready to open communities of men and women in Bhutan. We do not know the territory well, but if the authorities permit it, and we have the necessary conditions, we will willingly start our activities. We are happy to be able to respond in this way to the Pope's appeal in his Message for World Mission Day."
The style of evangelism and the missionary charism of the two communities is suited perfectly to the context of Bhutan: in fact, in India the sisters who are particularly working for the advancement of women, creating self-help groups for poor and indigenous women in the most remote areas, and for their children (in India they assist at least 20,000); the missionaries working with young people through education programs in colleges run by the Order, mostly in engineering and computer science (more than 8,000 students). During the activities that take place, the missionaries witness to "the Gospel values of love, forgiveness, sharing, unity, and solidarity, allowing them to grow and blossom in their hearts." They do not openly initiate conversions, instead clearly manifesting their Christian identity in work and prayer. In this way, Fr Arul told Fides, "We have never had problems with extreme mixed Hindu groups in India, nor have we ever suffered allegations of mass conversions." But "many among the women and youth who partake in our programs, spontaneously ask to embrace the Christian faith," he explains. This approach, based on the testimony, dialogue, aid and empathy with others, would certainly be welcome in an area such as Bhutan, where until now the Christian faith has been marginalized. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 27/1/2011)

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