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ASIA/NORTH KOREA - Religious freedom denied, over 50 thousand Christians in prison camps

Seoul (Agenzia Fides) - Human rights trampled and denied freedom of religion, more than 50 thousand Christians in prison camps for their faith, victims of a judicial system based strictly on ideology of the regime: this is the picture of the situation in North Korea, a country, according to the 2011 Report of the Ong "Open Doors", holds the "black shirt" in terms of respect for freedom of conscience and religion in the world.
The serious situation of fundamental rights is confirmed by Marzuki Darusman, the new UN special observer for Human Rights in North Korea. The recent report by Darusman presented at the UN Council for Human Rights in Geneva, explains that the judiciary system lacks independence compared to the regime. Besides the ordinary courts of judicial power, there exists a "parallel justice system" in the country that does not respect any of the procedural guarantees for the accused, which is needed to exercise more control over citizens.
The "parallel justice system" - says the report - is composed of a series of measures and bodies that can judge the behaviour of a person: the "Law on Control of National Security" and the "Judgement Committee of the Companions," a sort of "folk trial" governed by a purely ideological perspective, the "Lead Committee for life in the socialist legality" which carries out inspections at various levels and decides on the different types of punishment for social and economic crimes; the "Security Committee " for the trial of punishing North Korean citizens.
All Koreans or foreigners who fall into the verdicts of these trials, are sent to prison camps where detainees are regularly subjected to torture and cruel and inhuman treatment. The political dissidents and their families, often held for life, suffer hunger and forced labor. Among them are the prisoners of conscience and religion and, according to "Open Doors", there are over 50 thousand Christians. Among the detention centers known there is "Gwanliso" (work camp for prisoners of conscience), the "Gyohwaso" (work camp for prisoners of long-term), the "Jipgyulso" (simple prison), the "Rodongdanryundae "(prison labor).
Freedom of religion in North Korea is totally denied, as well as of conscience, opinion, religion, peaceful association. According to the testimonies of people who escaped from the country, the regime continues an intense anti-religious propaganda, prohibits religious activities and prosecutes those involved in religious activities, including private activities. The regime states that the "Juche", the official ideology of the state, is the only system of thought and belief allowed in North Korea. Despite the difficult situation, it is estimated that the Christians in Korea are currently about 400 thousand (2% of the population) who, in secret, keep in their hearts the burning flame of faith. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 04/14/2011)

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