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ASIA/MYANMAR - Autonomy and federal state : how the Burmese government betrayed the Kachin

Myitkyina (Fides Service) - "The key point is the agreement of Panlung in 1947: the Kachin signed it, like other ethnic minorities, supporting the struggle of General Aung San for the independence of Burma from the British colonial rule. The Kachin fought for independence alongside the Burmese people, in order to be part of the Democratic Union of Burma, with the idea of having autonomy in a federal state. Today, to understand the current position of the Kachin in current Myanmar, you have to start from that important agreement that was betrayed by the government": it is the analysis of Hpauje Kan Li, historian and Kachin scholar, emigrated from Myanmar to go abroad, and carries out research in Malaysia, the Philippines, the United States. "The spirit of the Kachin is to build peace in a federal state: this is the promise they believed in 60 years ago", he explains to Fides.
"But the successors of Aung San, that is to say Ne Win's and the following leaders, put into practice a policy of assimilation of ethnic minorities, not respecting their culture and rights. Distances have now widened: the current government does not recognize the Panlung agreement as a basis for negotiation. It must be said that the Kachin are not considered 'enemies of the people of Burma': they claim, however, dignity and rights within the nation", he notes.
Speaking of the people to whom he belongs, Kan Li explains: "The Kachin, who belong to the family of the ethnic Tibeto-Burman peoples, have been living peacefully in their land for centuries. They are honest, proud and generous. They are called Kachin in Myanmar, but their ancient name is "Singhpo" in India and "Jinghpo" (meaning "human") in China. According to tradition, the Kachin are people who "come down from heaven", caused by some spirits who came to earth, according to tradition , and settled there. They are very religious people, who give much importance to things of the spirit".
"The land where they live - he continued - is the present province of Yunnan (China), the western part of the states of Assam and Aurunachal Pradesh (in India) and Kachin state in Myanmar: all neighboring areas, divided by borders, but where the people live a unique spirit and culture. In India there are about 50 thousand, 135 thousand in China, in Myanmar over one million. They are tribes who have great desire for peace, so they can live as good citizens in China, India, Myanmar, Thailand".
The historian concludes: "It must be said that in the North of Myanmar people live in a state of extreme poverty: there is no infrastructure, education, transportation, no electricity. In addition, the land of the Kachin is exploited by multinational companies that extract minerals and gold, while the rain forest is slowly being cut to fuel the wood market. The resources are being exploited and people do not have any benefit from this development. Indeed, the Kachin are deprived of their lands and driven out. This is what happened to the project to build the dam and the hydroelectric plant at the confluence of Mali and NMAI, in the Kachin state, the project that gave rise to the rebellion and to the ongoing conflict. The Burmese government should respect the rights and autonomy of indigenous peoples: the whole of Burma would gain from it". (PA) (Agenzia Fides 16/07/2011)

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