



## **ASIA/INDONESIA - SOS of the Protestant Church in Bogor: Christians risk "mass persecution"**

Jakarta (Fides Service) - "The Indonesian Christian Church" (Gereja Kristen Indonesia, GKI) - denomination of the Protestant Church with a strong community presence on the island of Java - continues its fight for law and justice, against the harassment of civil authorities in Bogor. The town is located in the "Jakarta megalopolis", where there are tensions between the Islamic extremist groups of the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) and Christian communities.

The GKI has long received regulatory approval to build a church in Bogor. But the realization of the work is hindered by the Islamic militants as well as the unfavorable position of the mayor of Bogor, Diani Budiarto, who issued a revocation of the permit. The mayor, observe the faithful, "refuses to execute an order of the Supreme Court and to restore legality in Bogor". The GKI, given the hostility and abuse of power by the civil authorities, has issued an appeal, sent to Fides, which launches an "SOS" and states that, given the increasing tension, "the Christian faithful are at risk of mass persecution". The appeal criticizes the attitude of "intolerance and tyranny on behalf of the representatives of the government" who hide behind the protests of the local population, and do not respect the law, and therefore commit authentic injustice.

The lack of intervention of the authorities, warns the GKI, "can lead to violence, as Islamic militants seek to prevent Church assemblies". The faithful of the GKI, in fact, although the law is on their side, for over two years, not having a church, are forced to gather and celebrate the rites in the street, with all its relative problems, limitations, vulnerabilities, risks for safety.

That of Mayor Budiarto – the GKI says - is a real "challenge to the law", which prevents arbitrarily freedom of worship. In the last City Council meeting in Bogor, held on July 15, some representatives spoke and launched "intimidations and threats of mass mobilization" against the Christians of the GKI, inviting them to put an end to the assemblies in the street. No-one, however, denounces the GKI, "wanted to hear the explanations of the Christians, raised the voice to protect legitimate rights, or recalled the verdict of the Supreme Court".

The GKI's Christians believe that the "withdrawal of consent to build the church", issued by the mayor, is totally void and, by appealing to the central government, ask for the authorities protection. The faithful say they are ready to continue their campaign to defend their rights and for the freedom of worship in Indonesia: "We hope that the Republic of Indonesia, based on Pancasila, knows how to really protect its citizens, according to the protection guaranteed by the Constitution of 1945", concludes the text. The GKI has recently received the support of some representatives of "Nahdlatul Ulama" (NU), the largest Indonesian Muslim organization, which promotes a moderate Islam. The members of the NU, before the dispute in Bogor, stated "the supremacy of law" and condemned all acts of violence "against minorities of any religion". (PA) (Agenzia Fides 23/07/2011)