



## **ASIA/VIETNAM - The government will release 10 thousand prisoners. A Bishop: "One thinks of those who struggle for freedom, Justice, Democracy"**

Hanoi (Agenzia Fides) - The President of Vietnam, Truong Tan Sang, has ordered the release of 10,000 prisoners on the basis of an amnesty, granted annually on the occasion of National Independence Day, which is celebrated on September 2. According to preliminary information, these people were put in prison for common crimes, and no high-ranking dissident politicians are among those who will be released. There are, however, some representatives who belong to ethnic minorities from the central Highlands of Vietnam. In that area there are, the so-called "Montagnard" (mountain people), who are mainly Christians, and have always been repressed and marginalized by the Vietnamese government and fight for religious freedom and respect for human rights. Among the 10,535 prisoners who will be released, 11 are foreigners, serving sentences for having committed common crimes. The release of prisoners is a custom on the occasion of Independence Day: 17 thousand of them were released last year, 5,000 in 2009.

Mgr. Paul Nguyen Thai Hop, OP, Bishop of Vinh, and Chairman of the Commission "Justice and Peace" of the Episcopal Conference of Vietnam, commented to Fides: "The amnesty is a measure that is repeated every year and is often for prisoners held for crimes regarding security and not for people who are in prison for reasons of conscience. We have not yet the official list of people who will be released. What people are asking us to remember, on this occasion, are those who are imprisoned for political and conscience reasons, people who struggle for freedom, rights, justice, democracy. It is, however, good news that some members of ethnic minorities of the Central Highlands are released". The Justice and Peace Commission of Bishops, he concludes, "is following the situation on human rights, peace and justice in Vietnam with great attention, even in comparison with non-Catholic intellectuals and members of the Communist Party".

The Vietnamese Criminal Code applies the penalty of imprisonment to those who criticize the government publicly. The Vietnamese justice has punished Christian representatives and political groups not recognized by the government with long prison sentences. According to the Commission for Human Rights in Vietnam there are at least 258 political prisoners of conscience in the Vietnamese prisons, detained solely for their ideas. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 29/08/2011)