



ASIA/PHILIPPINES - Mindanao without peace: terrorism alarm, Islamic fundamentalists cause havoc, deadlock in the negotiations

Zamboanga City (Agenzia Fides) – Criminal terrorist groups in search of visibility; uncertainty about future policies; Islamic fundamentalist infiltration from abroad; deadlock in the peace process and the elections for the Autonomous Muslim Region: these are the main reasons behind the terror alert - even for places and Christian leaders - and the phase of instability that exists in Mindanao, the Philippines largest island in the South, involved in a thirty-year conflict between the Muslim rebel groups and the government in Manila. This is what Fr. Sebastiano D'Ambra, of the Pontifical Institute for Foreign Missions (PIFM) explains in an interview with Fides, who is a long-time missionary in the Philippines and strongly committed to working for Islam-Christian dialogue in South Philippines.

"The threat is real and the government is providing security and escorts for leaders and Christian places", said the missionary. "There are several elements that contribute to this unstable condition. On the one hand, there are criminal groups, such as 'Abu Sayyaf', in search of vision and want to reaffirm their presence. The current deadlock in the peace process and the postponement of elections in the Autonomous Muslim Region of Mindanao has led to discontent. " Meanwhile, says the missionary, "the components of civil society and tribal groups (the lumad) are excluded and are claiming their rights. I support a more inclusive approach in the peace negotiations, given that currently the government is negotiating only with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front".

With regards to hitting Christian targets, Fr. D'Ambra explains that "they guarantee publicity. Also one must not forget "the spread of the fundamentalist and restrictive vision of Islam, fueled by foreign states through funds, cultural programs, preachers and mosques, that have a certain approach which is not conducive to dialogue with Christians". This cannot be said about the work carried out by Fr. D'Ambra, busy with his movement for dialogue "Silsilah," which "reflects the aspirations of most of the people of Mindanao, tired of a conflict that has lasted for decades". "The work of dialogue, to build a culture of peace, above all, proceeds with religious leaders and young Muslims and Christians in schools and universities, who are the future of the country". (PA) (Agenzia Fides 23/09/2011)