



ASIA/INDONESIA - Churches shut down or demolished: the subtle pressures on Indonesian Christians

Jakarta (Agenzia Fides) - In 2010, 47 churches were shut down in Indonesia and in the first 4 months of 2011 9 Christian places of worship have been shut down or demolished: this is what "Jakarta Christian Communication Forum" (FKKJ) reports to Fides, these churches are considered "illegal" or "unauthorized", and this is why the civil authorities, in Java and other provinces of Indonesia, imposed the closure and suspension of all activities of worship.

In a note sent to Fides, the Forum of Christians in Jakarta, which includes leaders of all denominations, asks itself "why is this only applied to the Christian churches and not other places of worship", noting a discriminatory practice, which implies a subtle pressure on the believers in Christ. Local authorities sometimes fail to give an answer to this question. The official reasons for the closure of churches speak of "houses used as places of worship, without a license" or without the minimum number of 60 faithful. But it is, in most cases, the measures taken following protests from Muslim radical groups, as for example what happens in the suburbs of Jakarta (as Bekasi and Bogor), where there is a widespread presence of the fundamentalist group "Islamic Defenders Front" (FPI) (see Fides 23/7/2011).

"Christians are regarded as foreigners who arrive in a territory" notes the Forum, which indicates a series of "adequate responses": "Be prepared to overcome obstacles, to know the rules and respond with legal action; to meet the civil authorities; to be present in the world of mass media; to establish fruitful dialogue with local Muslim leaders, to foster mutual understanding; to socialize with the local population by initiating positive activities", this is because Christians in Indonesia "want to be a blessing to society and the nation". (PA) (Agenzia Fides 29/09/2011)