



ASIA/MYANMAR - Farewell to death penalty: all those condemned to death sentence are commuted to life imprisonment

Yangon (Agenzia Fides) - It is a further turning point, announced by the government of Myanmar, in the field of the new measure of amnesty which concerns hundreds of prisoners: in addition to significant reductions in punishment for many prisoners, all those sentenced to death has been commuted to life imprisonment, in what observers call "the abolition of capital punishment". If one thinks that what happens in a country where violent repression has been a tool used in a fierce manner for decades, the measure adopted by President Thein Sein is really significant, "it represents a real breakthrough for the full respect of the right to life and human rights," comments Stephen Argentino to Fides, Coordinator of the Campaign for the abolition of the death penalty, for the European and Asian area, in the Community of St. Egidio. "This is a very important measure, unexpected and surprising. Only until a few months ago - said Argentino - it was thought that capital punishment was untouchable in Myanmar. This is a hopeful sign that confirms the launch of a new course, which affirms the full respect of human dignity".

In Myanmar, despite the continuous condemnations, death penalty was not applied since 1988. Now the commutation of the sentence is life imprisonment, according to observers, a concrete step towards the full and final abolition. "Countries where violence has triumphed for years, such as Cambodia, Rwanda, now Myanmar, have suddenly decided to abandon death penalty: This is a form of catharsis, which confirms the deterrent's little value of punishment", said Argentino.

The World Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty, which the Community of St. Egidio is part of, has welcomed with favor and joy the announcement of the measure, which goes "in the right direction for the respect of all fundamental human rights". (PA) (Agenzia Fides 04/01/2012)