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ASIA/MYANMAR-The government has signed a "ceasefire" with Karen rebels, but "the objective is complete reconciliation"

Yangon (Agenzia Fides) - The government of Myanmar has signed a cease-fire with the Karen rebels, an ethnic minority group, which has been in conflict with the Burmese army for 60 years . A step forward that Fr. Bernard Hyacinth Arputhasamy SJ, Director of the "Jesuit Refugee Service" (JRS) for the Asia-Pacific area, defines to Fides as "just the beginning, as the central objective must be the complete reconciliation with ethnic minorities and substantial improvement of people's lives".
The agreement was signed in the course of negotiations which took place with the Karen National Union in the city of Hpa-an, in the Karen state. The parties will allow the passage of men and goods across their territories. The government negotiated a cease-fire with 17 other insurgent groups since 1989, even if conflicts continue in fits and starts. According to Fides sources, President Thein Sein gave orders to stop the military operations in the ongoing conflict in the North with Kachin rebels, but the order has not yet been fully implemented by the military.
Fr. Bernard Hyacinth Arputhasamy SJ, has been involved with JRS (Jesuit NGOs) for years in assisting thousands of Burmese refugees who have fled to Thailand and settled in the border areas (in what observers call a "Little Burma"). In an interview with Fides, Fr. Arputhasamy looks favorably on the move by the Burmese government, but remarked: "It is a good first step, but much remains to be done to meet the real needs of the population, which are mainly survival, development, education and employment . The basis for reaching these goals is a complete reconciliation with ethnic minorities". As far as the conflict with the Kachin is concerned, Fr. Arputhasamy explains that "the continuation of the conflict may be due to the fact that different factions, present among the rebels and the army, do not agree on the block of war".
With regard to the process of the opening of Myanmar, in the last period, the head of the JRS said: "These are short term moves, but a long-term plan is needed concerning the transition, to ensure substantial changes for the people, towards democracy and human rights . I believe that other protagonists enter the political strategy, including foreign powers, China and the United States, which contend for the political influence in the area. What we hope is that the transition is peaceful and does not result in a civil war". (PA) (Agenzia Fides 12/01/2012)

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