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Fondata nel 1927

AMERICA/PANAMA - Mgr. Lacunza intermediary between government and indigenous protesters to avoid other deaths

Panama (Agenzia Fides) - The President of the Episcopal Conference of Panama, His Exc. Mgr. Jose Luis Lacunza, OAR, Bishop of the Diocese of David, has succeeded in his mission as mediator between the government and the indigenous ethnic Ngäbe Bugle by signing a peace agreement that puts an end to the violence of past days, causing deaths and injuries. The conflict was born as the natives demanded legal guarantees for their ancestral lands, so that the new mining law limits the extraction of mineral resources and respect the water.
One person died and at least 46 were injured during the clashes which took place on February 5 between the police and indigenous protesters in the vicinity of the mission of the Augustiniani Recolletti in Bocas del Toro. The protesters had previously blocked the main street, followed by clashes with security forces.
According to information gathered by Fides, both the government and the leaders of the protesters had agreed to talk only with the mediation of the Catholic Church, and yesterday the news released was that Mgr. José Luis Lacunza Maestrojuán had read in the local rural school, San Lawrence, home of the talks, about 400 km from the capital, the agreement that has restored peace to that area.
The chief of the Ngäbe Bugle, Silvia Carrera, who led the protest, before signing the document said: "We have not yet achieved anything, the indigenous Ngäbe people are struggling more than 500 years, and this has prompted us to disbelieve in the authorities, but today we all want to go home quietly, with the hope of seeing the promises of the State ".
The Panamanian Minister of the Presidency, Demetrio Papadimitriu, on his behalf, thanked Mgr. Lacunza for having handled the mediator, and expressed the sorrow of the national government for the death of the young Jeronimo Rodriguez, which happened during the fighting. (CE) (Agenzia Fides 09/02/2012)

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