



## **AMERICA/PANAMA-Still tension between the government and indigenous people, dialogue is postponed for carnival**

Panama City (Agenzia Fides) - The indigenous leaders of the ethnic Ngäbe Bugle and representatives of the Panamanian government have suspended negotiations on the new law restricting the mining and the defense of the water resources in indigenous territories, until next February 27. One of the four indigenous groups, the Vigui, however, has blocked the International Pan-American Highway and does not allow anyone to pass. The President of the Episcopal Conference of Panama, Monsignor José Luis Lacunza, Bishop of the Diocese of David, read to the press the statement signed by the negotiators which confirms that there is already an agreement to eliminate mining in the region Ngäbe Bugle, but there are other aspects to be defined.

Mgr. Lacunza is the mediator between the two parties after, between January 31 and February 5, the natives had blocked the Pan-American Highway, the largest artery of the country, which was later reopened after violent clashes with the police, which had caused two deaths and dozens of injuries (see Fides 09/02/2012). From February 7 negotiations had started, which have now been suspended until Monday, February 27 to allow the feast of carnival to be held.

For this reason, the leader of the Group Ngäbe Bugle, Silvia Carrera, has expressed her disappointment at the interruption of dialogue and has defined the government "irresponsible" and "incapable", but then asked her countrymen to grant a truce until the announced date for the resumption of talks. As a matter of fact, as soon as the interruption of dialogue began circulating, dozens of Indians blocked the Pan American Highway in four points of the west, at a time when thousands of Panamanians are moving towards the center of the capital and the western part of Panama for carnival.

The various leaders Ngäbe Bugle, with the exception of Vigui, told the press that they have accepted the ceasefire, but will remain in a state of attention to the edges of the International Pan-American Highway, up to day 27. In the region of Vigui, in the central province of Veraguas, the natives have instead blocked the way to clarify the situation with "Silvia Carrera". Vigui is about 300 kilometers west from the capital of Panama, and is one of the key areas of access to the region. (CE) (Agenzia Fides 20/2/2012)