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# ASIA/MYANMAR - The Bishop of Banmaw: "Peace long and difficult on Kachin land, full of landmines"

Banmaw (Agenzia Fides) - The landmines that the land is scattered with and the serious epidemics affecting children: are among the most pressing problems of the population of ethnic Kachin, in the north of Myanmar, the scene of the clash between government troops and Kachin Independence Army" rebels (KIA). This is what emerges from an appeal sent to Fides from Monsignor Raymond Sumlut Gam, Bishop of Banmaw, who after 8 months since the fighting began, launches a strong appeal for peace and reconciliation.
The Bishop's text describes the situation in the area: "Now there are over 57,000 displaced people. The diocese is strongly influenced by the civil war and the people have fled to the cities and border areas. Currently our Caritas takes care of 13,500 IDPs in different camps. We offer schooling, clothes, food, medicine, education, support, pastoral care and spiritual assistance. But the displaced people in remote and border areas live in poor conditions, with limited shelter and humanitarian assistance".
The Bishop is concerned about the most serious problems: "In recent months respiratory diseases among children have broken out, but also dysentery, malaria and tuberculosis, with a high risk of mortality." In addition, "agricultural land around villages are scattered with landmines. A faithful, crossing his field of sugar cane, due to the explosion of a mine, lost his leg and right arm. Therefore the refugees are afraid to resume a normal life and their future is precarious." Although "the fighting seem to have diminished in intensity, the population is only cautiously optimistic about the possibility of real peace."
The President of Myanmar, Thein Sein, ordered the army to stop its offensive for the first time on 10 December 2011 and the second time on January 13, 2012. "But we have not seen substantial changes on the ground," notes the Bishop. Peace talks between the government and the KIA took place twice in Ruili, a town on the border with China, in late January, but without concrete results. According to official reports, the two sides will meet again in February to talk about peace.
The Bishop concludes: "I ask you to continue praying for the Kachin people who are suffering and I call upon the international community and governments to put pressure on the parties for an immediate end to the conflict and to build peace and reconciliation." (PA) (Agenzia Fides 20/2/2012)

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