



## **AMERICA/EL SALVADOR - The Cathedral is still occupied, dialogue has been interrupted for the "Easter holidays"**

San Salvador (Agenzia Fides) - The Archbishop of San Salvador, His Exc. Mgr. Jose Escobar Alas, complained that for the past three months, the Metropolitan Cathedral has been occupied by a group of ex-combatants, which does not allow the religious celebrations to be held. "We regret that our Cathedral is still occupied, especially during this special moment such as Holy Week. This is why, once again, we ask the people who are inside to reflect and desist from this evil act that goes against the respect and honor of God and violates the right of people to worship God in his temple", said the Archbishop talking to the press.

According to local Fides sources, the Archbishop stressed that this situation constitutes a violation of the right to the freedom of religion guaranteed by Article 25 of the Constitution of the Republic. Meanwhile, the occupants have expressed their willingness to negotiate and leave the premises of the church. Camilo Artiga, one of the occupants, explained that this forceful action continues because the negotiation process has stopped for the Easter holidays. "The Government of the Republic and the Archbishop know our willingness to continue negotiations and to give temple back before Holy Week, but it was not possible because the American government went on vacation," said Artiga. The occupants have also criticized Mgr. Escobar Alas' words, when he said that their decision is "an act of disrespect" towards the faithful.

The ex-combatants, who entered the cathedral occupying it at the beginning of January, announced that they are not going away until a commission to negotiate with the government is set up. The demands of ex-combatants regard their reinstatement as veterans of the police and the reinstatement of their representative in parliament; the recognition of their trade union (see Fides 16/01/2012). They also stressed their good will because, without having yet reached any agreement, they have opened the Cathedral to ensure that the faithful could visit the grave of Archbishop Romero, on the anniversary of his assassination. "Everything depends on the government if a proper agreement is reached, and if there is an agreement, tomorrow the faithful can also come to Mass in the Cathedral" said Artiga. (CE) (Agenzia Fides 03/04/2012)