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ASIA/EAST TIMOR- New president elected: the challenges are education and development

Dili (Agenzia Fides) - The Republic of East Timor, the youngest nation in Asia, has its new president: Taur Matan Ruak, former guerilla leader who, according to the Election Commission data, has already received more than 60% of the votes and the election is almost completed and official figures are expected tomorrow. The elections, and also the post-vote count phase, "were characterized by transparency and tranquility, free of tension and violence. There is a stable situation in the country and this is a good sign for the future of the country," says to Fides the Jesuit Bernard Hyacinth Arputhasamy SJ, Director of the "Jesuit Refugee Service "Asia-Pacific, which has been working in East Timor for several years. The Director recalls that "the president has no executive powers, and therefore the next general elections, to be held between July and September, in this sense will be more important in terms of policies to be implemented and therefore for the future of the nation."
Among the challenges East Timor faces, Fr. Bernard notes, "We hope for good governance that helps to develop sectors such as education, food security, infrastructure, well-being. The rate of poverty and unemployment in East Timor is very high: a short-term and a long-term plan is necessary to improve the lives of people."
East Timor is celebrating 10 years of independence this year (obtained by Indonesia in 2002) and is preparing for a transition year, as the UN peacekeeping forces are planning to leave the country after six years of mission. UN blue helmets entered in 2006 after widespread riots and unrest that involved former soldiers from different factions.
East Timor is one of the few Asian nations with a large Catholic majority and the Church has always claimed to want to contribute to the growth and development of the country. The Jesuits work in assisting refugees in East Timor, where they carry out the pastoral work, and next year they will open a high school. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 17/4/2012)

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