



## **ASIA/MYANMAR - A Bishop: priorities for the country are peace and reconciliation with minorities**

Banmaw (Agenzia Fides) – While the Secretary of the UN Ban Ki-Moon has asked the President of Myanmar and the opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi to work together for the change, the Burmese Church goes back to indicating peace and reconciliation with ethnic minorities as a priority for the country.

Mgr. Raymond Sumlut Gam, Bishop of Banmaw, in the north of the country, where the conflict is still ongoing with the ethnic Kachin rebels, says he is concerned in a message to Fides: "The military operations of government troops continue. The number of IDPs has increased to around 70 thousand and 40 thousand are in the diocese of Banmaw ". The bishop, returning from a visit to refugee camps, reports that "95% of refugees are Christians. Most of the displaced are women and children and about 8,900 of them are children under the age of 15. More than 20 schools in remote villages have been closed due to fighting. We have created provisional elementary schools in tents in some camps . But there is a shortage of teachers and materials for school education."

In the diocese of Banmaw there are 13 parishes with about 29,000 Catholics out of a civilian population of about 400 thousand inhabitants. Many parishes are strongly affected by the civil war and refugees who come from the countryside continue to flee to the cities. Currently, Caritas Banmaw, with the tireless work of priests, religious and catechists, help some 13,500 internally displaced persons in several temporary camps. "Humanitarian aid – explains the Bishop to Fides - come from generous benefactors. We need tents, warm clothes, food, medicine, but in addition to the support we provide pastoral care and spiritual assistance." Mgr. Sumlut Gam launches an appeal to the universal Church to "pray and support the victims of the civil war in the state of Kachin and to do everything possible for peace and reconciliation."

Although the President of Myanmar, Thein Sein, has twice ordered the army to stop its offensive against the Kachin rebels, fighting continues in northern Myanmar. In recent peace talks held in March, the Kachin restated the principle of self-determination, within the framework of the Burmese nation, and a cease-fire agreement monitored by international observers. However, no concrete solution was reached. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 30/4/2012)