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ASIA/PHILIPPINES - Religious Liberty but also "strengthening of the sharia" in the joint Declaration of Government and Islamic rebels

Cotabato City (Agenzia Fides) – The new "political subject" which the government and Islamic rebels are agreeing to create in the South Philippines, in the framework of a type of federal system – to substitute the actual Autonomous Muslim Region of Mindanao – recognizes the identity of the Philippine Muslims, guarantees religious liberty but, on the other hand, admits to the strengthening of the jurisdiction of Islamic tribunals according to the sharia, which, however, will be applied only to Muslim communities. This is what has emerged from the ""Dichiarazione di Principio" (Declaration of Principle) signed at the end of April in Kuala Lumpur by the government and by the MILF (Moro Islamic Liberation Front) which will constitute the basis for the signing of an agreement of lasting peace. The document in 10 points, sent to the Fides Agency, contain the following points:

1.Recognition of the Bangsamoro identity (the Philippine Muslims ndr) and of their legitimate rivendications; 2. Commitment to the creation of a new political autonomous entity instead of the Autonomous Muslim Region of Mindanoa; 3.Continuation of negotiations; 4.The new political autonomous entity must have a ministerial form of government; 5. A period of transition in order to put into practice the dispositions of the accord; 6. Sharing of power and resources between the national government and the new political entity. The government will be responsible for defence and external security, external affairs, global commerce, finance and monetary policy, citizenship and naturalization, postal services. 7. The new political subject will be allowed to create its own sources of income; 8.Strengthening of the Sharia judges and extension of their jurisdiction on cases. The new political subject will have competence over the Islamic justice system; 9. Creation of mechanisms of monitoring and evaluation that already existing competent organisms can use; 10.Citizens already resident in the new political subject are guaranteed: right to live and protection of the dignity of the person; right of liberty of religion and expression; right to privacy; right of liberty of speech; right to express political opinion and follow political aspirations democratically; right to ask for constitutional changes by pacific and legitimate means; right of political participation and protection from all kinds of violence for women; right to freely choose one's own place of residence; right of equal opportunities in social and economic activities; right to form religious and cultural associations. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 18/5/2012)

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