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ASIA/MYANMAR - State of emergency in the west of the country: Church's appeal for peace

Pyay (Agenzia Fides) - "The situation is dramatic, tension is very high among the ethnic majority communities of the Rakhine and the Muslim Rohingya population. We hope that the civil authorities can restore peace. As a Church we appeal to all, hoping and praying for peace": is what Mgr. Thomas Htun Myint, Vicar General of the Diocese of Pyay, in the west of Myanmar, on the border with Bangladesh says to Fides.
The diocese covers the territory of the state of Rakhine (formerly Arakan state) where the President of Myanmar, Thein Sein, has declared a state of emergency because of sectarian violence between the local population of Rakhine, of Buddhist religion, and the Muslim Rohingya who inhabit the area. The measure provides for a greater allocation of military and special powers to the authorities, that have imposed a curfew in some cities in the state, to restore order. Even the UN has initiated the evacuation of UN personnel committed in the state, made up of 44 operators with their families, until now engaged in humanitarian assistance.
Mgr. Thomas Htun Myint reports to Fides that "some Christian families have taken refuge in our church in Settwe due to fear. As Christians we are few, and we are not in any way involved in the violence. But the faithful fear of being victims of the clashes, even by mistake, and therefore flee." "We ask everyone to safeguard peace and harmony, which is the greatest good for our society," said the Vicar. The cycle of violence and reprisals began about a week ago, after news of a rape and murder of a Rakhine woman, of which a Rohingya man is accused. In retaliation, some Rakhine killed 10 Rohingya, and hence the retaliation of the Muslim ethnic Rohingya in the Rakhine villages: in past days, over 500 houses in the villages in Rakhine were burnt down by the Muslim Rohingya, with a toll of 7 deaths and 17 wounded. According to President Thein Sein, the violence is fueled by discontent existing among the various ethnic and religious groups, by hatred and the desire for revenge. "I would like to invite people, political parties, religious leaders and the media to join the government, to help restore peace and stability, and to avoid further escalation of violence," the President said. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 11/6/2012)

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