



ASIA/PHILIPPINES - A missionary: "The agreement government-rebels decisive for the future of Mindanao"

Zamboanga City (Agenzia Fides) - The peace agreement reached between the Philippine government and the rebels of the "Moro Islamic Liberation Front" (MILF) "will be decisive for the future of Mindanao and the development of its populations of Christians, Muslims and Lumad (indigenous)". This is what is said by Fr. Sebastiano D'Ambra, PIME to Fides who has been on the island of Mindanao for 40 years and founder of the Islamic-Christian "Silsialh", in the aftermath of the agreement announced between the parties. "President Aquino - continues the missionary - strongly wanted a peace agreement, but both sides have shown good will. The key point is that of 'ancestral domain', which determines the lands and natural resources assigned to local Muslim groups ". However, notes Fr. D'Ambra, "there are still Islamic factions that do not accept the agreement and intend to fight" and that, therefore, " the work of building dialogue and good relations between Christians and Muslims in the southern Philippines is fundamental."

In recent days, the government and rebels of MIIF have reached an agreement on the conflict which for over 40 years has been hitting the south of the archipelago. The agreement, signed in the 32nd session of negotiation talks, held in Kuala Lumpur from October 2 to 7, has been defined "a milestone for the country" and will be officially ratified by the parties on October 15. In a joint statement issued at the end of the talks, sent to Fides, the parties submit that the agreement will serve as a "cornerstone for global peace process" and "lays the foundation for fair and lasting peace in Mindanao," the big island in the South of the Philippines

The agreement, which will be submitted to a popular referendum, expects to create by 2016 a semi-autonomous Muslim region in Mindanao area, home to the large minority of about 6 million Muslim Filipinos. The government will retain control of the defense and security, and the management of foreign and economic policy. The parties will form a Provisional Committee to manage the transition phase that will supervise five provinces, three cities and six municipalities that will be part of the autonomous region. The municipalities could increase as a result of the local elections in 2013.

The result is a success for Benigno Aquino Jr's presidency, who, in his political program, had promised a peace agreement that emphasizes the joint statement, "on the one hand guarantees the rights, dignity and prosperity of the Bangsamoro people" and at the same time, "respects the sovereignty and the Constitution of the Philippines ". (PA) (Agenzia Fides 08/10/2012)