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AMERICA/PANAMA - Violent protest concerning the "Law 72": the Catholic church the only intermediary between the parties

Colon (Agenzia Fides) - The Catholic Church in Panama expressed "concern" due to the ongoing violence between citizens and police, but also "confidence in the attitude of the government": is what is said in a note sent to Fides Agency by Fr. Eusebio Muñoz, spokesman for the Catholic Church. The Church calls "the population to find peace and calm," invoking on each "the wisdom of the Holy Spirit."
The story that is shaking the country regards the approval of "Law 72", which allows the selling of state land to privates in the so-called "free trade zone" (ZLC), near the Panama Canal (see Fides 22/10/2012 and 24/10/2012). The local population, trade unions and activist groups are protesting because this measure makes it possible for foreign investors to buy that land and disrupt the lives of local communities.
Two days ago, the people took to the streets and the Evangelical Church in the country also organized a "March for Peace" in the center of the city of Colon. Yesterday, on October 26, there were other protests which led to violent clashes among the police and acts of vandalism, with a toll of eight seriously injured and 240 arrested by the police. According to the local media, the Catholic Church is the only organization that acts as a mediator, seeking a dialogue between the parties. While the government has indicated its intention to amend in certain respects Law 72, the population is demanding the complete withdrawal of the law. According to observers, the President of Panama could announce a "backtrack".
The ZLC is considered the largest in the world after Hong Kong. And home to more than 3,000 companies, that create 30,000 jobs and gives contributions to the Inland Revenue for $ 100 million a year.
(CE) (Agenzia Fides 27/10/2012)

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