



## **AMERICA/PANAMA - The Catholic Church mediates between firemen and government authorities**

Panama City (Agenzia Fides) - Dialogue between the representatives of the General Directorate of the Fire Brigade and the authorities of the Government of Panama is still in progress, in order to examine a list of 13 requests, including a salary increase after a week of protests and strikes. The dialogue will be held at the Vice Presidency's office of the University of Panama and is mediated by the Catholic Church, according to the request expressed as a condition by the firemen and accepted by the government. The tense public situation exacerbated on 8 and 9 December, when many firemen blocked the main streets of Panama City with trucks and tankers, creating serious inconvenience to attract public attention and ask for the intervention of the President of the republic, Ricardo Martinelli.

Essentially, it was the intervention of the Archdiocese, and with a group of coordination persuaded the firemen to establish dialogue with the civil authorities. From the note sent to Fides Agency, we learn that the wage increase requested by the firemen, who depend on the government, falls in a context in which the management of Martinelli tries to spend as little as possible to cover its deficit, as set by law fiscal responsibility. Other protests had occurred when the government tried to privatize the land of the free zone of Colon (see Fides 22/10/2012) to raise new funds, and then had to give up because of the protests. Even then the Church had intervened (see Fides 27/10/2012) proposing to continue the dialogue between the parties. (CE) (Agenzia Fides 12/12/2012)