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AMERICA/VENEZUELA - For almost a year, the Church cannot enter prisons

Caracas (Agenzia Fides) - The Pastoral of Prisons denounced that the country's political ideology takes priority over religious assistance. In the tragic events that happened in the detention center of Uribana on January 25 (see Fides 30/01/2013), one of the dead was the evangelical pastor Segundo Camejo, a volunteer in this detention center. Just after this tragedy, the religious hierarchies, both the Catholic Church and the Evangelical Church, complained that the authorities have denied access for voluntary religious for almost a year in prison.
In a note sent to Fides Agency, we learn that the National Delegate for the Pastoral Care of Prisons of the Venezuelan Episcopal Conference (CEV), father Ponc Capell, believes that the authorities have not given any indication of wanting to maintain a commitment of religious assistance to prisoners, but, on the contrary, on many occasions ignore this right. In fact, of the 40 chaplains appointed by the Episcopal Conference at a national level, only 26 have been recognized by the government. Father Capell said there are more than 300 lay people involved in voluntary work in the 40 prisons in the country, denouncing the politicization of the issue of prisons. What was also pointed out was the fact that ideological volunteering is promoted more than that of religion. "But we will continue to work with more energy and enthusiasm, because we know that governments pass, but the Church remains. In addition, there will always be people willing to share the experience of God and have the motivation to change," he said.
María José González, Head of the Caritas office in Los Teques, who for six years has worked in the Penitentiary Pastoral in the region of Miranda, said: "Since December 2011 we have not formally entered in prisons because we have an explicit prohibition of the government. So our volunteers must go to visit the prisoners as if it were a family visit, but this severely limits the work with the inmates and also that concerning their rehabilitation." (CE) (Agenzia Fides 12/02/2013)

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