



ASIA/NORTH KOREA - An American sentenced to hard labor: religions call for dialogue

Seoul (Agenzia Fides) - "I believe that the case of Kenneth Bae will be used by North Korea to open a direct dialogue with the United States. As religious communities we renew our call for dialogue, respect for human rights and religious freedom": This is what Rev. Kim Tae Sung, Christian leader, deputy secretary of the "Korean Conference of Religions for Peace" that brings together different religious leaders in Korea to promote dialogue, reconciliation and peace says to Fides Agency. Rev. Kim commented on the news that North Korea has condemned a U.S. citizen Kenneth Bae to 15 years hard labor for committing "crimes against the state." Bae, 44, was born in South Korea, but he is a naturalized American citizen. According to some human rights activists, Bae is a practicing Christian, committed to a charitable organization "Joseph Connection" of Christian inspiration. He was arrested in November 2012 because thought to have taken pictures of malnourished children: Pyongyang, in fact, has not specified the crimes committed by Bae. The United States has called on North Korea to release the prisoner for "humanitarian reasons". American officials have pointed out that Bae had entered the country with a valid visa. The sentence comes after two months of war threats from Pyongyang towards the United States and South Korea. Several U.S. citizens have been detained in North Korea in recent years and have been the subject of negotiations and often freed in exchange for humanitarian aid.

Rev. Kim Tae Sung, Christian leader explained to Fides that in such a tense situation, the work of dialogue and the contribution of religions continue on two levels: "at an internal level, in South Korea, with a work to raise awareness of reconciliation; at an international level, through the "Asian Conference of Religions for Peace" (ACRP), we are trying to bring together representatives from North and South Korea, to pick up the threads of dialogue. A meeting may take place at the next convention of the ACRP in Indonesia at the beginning of June." (PA) (Agenzia Fides 02/05/2013)