



## **ASIA/MYANMAR - Religious leaders' appeal: "Stop religious hatred; together for the development of the country"**

Yangon (Agenzia Fides) - The leaders of the major religions in Myanmar launched a strong appeal to the nation to stop religious violence and build together the well-being and "a future of hope for the country": says a joint statement issued at the conclusion of a meeting held in Yangon by the U.S. Ambassador Derek Mitchell and sent to Fides Agency. The ambassador and the entire international community had been asked to give a contribution to bring religious harmony in Myanmar - after clashes between Muslims and Buddhists registered in recent months - by His Exc. Mgr. Charlas Maung Bo, Archbishop of Yangon, present at the meeting and signatory of the appeal as a representative of the Catholic Church.

"As a nation, we have begun a journey that is a new dawn of hope in our nation," reads the text sent to Fides Agency by Archbishop Bo and signed, among others, also by Muslim leader U Aye Lwin, of the "Islamic Center of Myanmar", and by the Buddhist leader Sitagu Sayadaw. The text urges all the people of Burma "to embark on a journey of friendship that will bring peace and prosperity for all."

The statement recalled that the government has started a process of gradual opening to international relations, launched reforms, reduced censorship, freed political prisoners, praising the efforts to "bring greater peace and harmony."

"We appeal to all members of every religion - asks the text - because peace is the only path for our country. We note with dismay that the recent inter-religious conflict, resulting in large-scale destruction of property, the death of hundreds of innocent men and women, and the displacement of thousands of people, is a sad event for our culture, known for its deep spiritual richness and the joy of its people".

Religious leaders underline emphatically that "no religion teaches hatred," and urge the faithful of all communities to "avoid hate speech against members of other religions," stressing that "these conflicts may postpone the process of reforms in the nation." The urgent issues for the people, they say, are "education, health care, and human development," which can only be "in a climate of mutual respect, acceptance of the principles of unity and diversity, and tolerance." The statement also calls on all religious leaders to "lead by example through marches and meetings to promote peace and religious harmony." (PA) (Agenzia Fides 28/06/2013)