



## **ASIA/PHILIPPINES – Mgr. Villegas, Cardinal Sin’s successor, dusts off the "critical collaboration" with the government**

Manila (Agenzia Fides) - The relationship between Church and government will be marked by a "critical collaboration": His Exc. Mgr. Socrates Villegas, Archbishop of Lingayen-Dagupan and newly elected President of the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, has dusted off an expression that characterized the years of the late Cardinal of Manila, Jaime Sin, Filipino historical figure of the episcopate. As reported to Fides Agency, the Archbishop used this expression speaking about the controversial Reproductive Health Bill (RH Bill), which promotes contraceptives and birth control methods, presented by the government of President Benigno Aquino and approved by Parliament. Some groups of Filipino Catholics, opposing the measure, have filed an appeal to the Supreme Court, arguing that it is contrary to the Constitution. Today, July 9, there will be a hearing before the Court, to listen to the "verbal arguments".

"The Church is not a lobby, it is not an NGO, it is not a political group. We are of Christ. The mission of the Church is spiritual, and if we get involved, it is because our spiritual mission tells us to do it", said Mgr. Villegas at the conclusion of the assembly of Bishops who elected him President and will officially begin service in December 2013. Some bishops and priests, he said, will be present at the hearing before the Court, "not as a pressure group, but as moral leaders." To show the support of the Church to those who announced the appeal, Mgr. Villegas celebrated a Mass and held a prayer vigil in Manila. "Our first contribution for social change is prayer," he pointed out.

"The Church will always speak - he continued - when human rights are denied, when human dignity is violated when the family is attacked, the poor suffer unfairly or children are abused. We are against anyone who wants to destroy the stability, integrity and sanctity of the family. "

According to the Archbishop, the position of the bishops is always that of "critical collaboration" with the government, remembering the words of the enlightened Cardinal Sin. "When the government serves the common good - he explained –it can count on the full cooperation of the bishops. But when the common good is compromised or when the moral norms are violated, human dignity trampled, or if the family and human life are attacked, understandably it is expected that the bishops will be critical".

"Our job as men of the Church - he said - is not to be social activists, but activists of conscience, so that every conscience listens to the voice of God", according to the Church's social doctrine. Mgr. Villegas finally invited politicians and media operators to "respect the identity of the Church". (PA) (Agenzia Fides 09/07/2013)