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ASIA/INDONESIA - Religious tolerance under the UN lens in Indonesia

Jakarta (Agenzia Fides) - What is the status of respect for human rights and religious freedom in Indonesia? Is there an atmosphere of religious intolerance? These are issues that these days (in the July 8-26 session) are being examined by the UN Commission for Human Rights, based in Geneva. As reported to Fides, the Commission gathered documentation, especially from civil society and religious communities, which registers the deterioration of tolerance and also cites cases of "religious persecution."
The Indonesian Minister for Religious Affairs, Suryadharma Ali, publicly said yesterday that "Indonesia is a country that respects its pluralistic society" and the six recognized religions (Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism), deploring the fact that the media have focused only on the situation of Ahmadis and Shias, and the case of a church of the "GKI Yasmin Congregation", in Bogor, in West Java.
Suryadharma cited data from the Ministry highlighting a general increase in places of worship: according to the data, between 1997 and 2004, the number of mosques saw an increase of 64%, a 131% increase of Christian churches, 152% of Catholic churches, 475% of the Hindu temples, 368% of Buddhist temples
However, several reports document the rise of religious intolerance in Indonesia in recent years. A study of the "Wahid Institute," institute of Indonesian study which promotes religious pluralism, notes that cases of religious intolerance in 2012 were 274 compared to 267 in 2011 and 184 in 2010. Another report published in 2013 by the NGO "Human Rights Watch" defines the Indonesian government "complice in the persecution of religious minorities", as it failed to enforce laws and promulgate regulations that violate the rights of minorities.
Jesuit Fr. Franz Magnis-Suseno SJ, a Jesuit priest and professor of philosophy in Jakarta, one of the leading scholars of dialogue and religion in the Indonesian Church, in an open letter sent to Fides defined President of Indonesia Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono accomplice and creator of the climate of religious intolerance and violence against minorities that is registered in Indonesia (see Fides 23/05/2013). The letter reminds the "increasing difficulties of Christians to obtain permits for the opening of places of worship, the growing number of churches forcibly closed, the increase of regulations that make the worship for minorities more difficult, the growing level of intolerance". (PA) (Agenzia Fides 11/07/2013)

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