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ASIA/MALAYSIA – Legal comparison Church-government on the use of the word "Allah"; the Nuncio promotes the line of dialogue

Kuala Lumpur (Agenzia Fides) - The comparison between the Catholic Church and the Malaysian government on the use of the word "Allah" to refer to God in the Bible and in Christian publications is enriched by a new chapter: as reported to Fides by the local Church, in past days the Catholic Church filed in court a request for the cancellation of the application submitted by the government in 2009. The Catholic Church had initiated legal proceedings in 2008 against a provision of the Malaysian government which banned the use of "Allah" to Christians. In 2009, a court ruled in favor of the Catholic Church, and the government had then appealed to the High Court, which has still not been examined yet.
Christians believe that using the term "Allah" to call God is a right for 60% of Malaysian Christians, those that worship in "Bahasha Malaysia" language. In the local language, in fact, there is no other term for God, only "Allah", as happens normally for Christians living in the Arab world.
Even the new Apostolic Nuncio in Malaysia, His Exc. Mgr. Giuseppe Marino, has spoken publicly on the line of interfaith dialogue. The Nuncio said that "religion cannot be a source of discord in society". Some Muslim groups had interpreted some of Bishop Marino's statements in a distorted way and the Malaysian government had invoked the principle of "non-interference" on the ongoing legal matter between Church and government. Meeting with Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Anifah Aman, the Nuncio clarified the misunderstanding, saying that "it was never his intention to interfere in the internal affairs of Malaysia". "As Apostolic Nuncio - says a note from the Nuncio, sent to Fides - I firmly believe that interfaith dialogue is the means to promote good relations among people of different faiths who can discover the beauty of other peoples' faith", and assured "his commitment to this mission".
Out of 28 million inhabitants of Malaysia, Christians make up about 10% of the population, while Muslims are 61% of the population. Diplomatic relations between Malaysia and the Holy See were established in 2011. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 18/07/2013)

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