



ASIA/SOUTH KOREA - The industrial area of Kaeseong, bordering the North re-opens: Mass of the Archbishop of Seoul

Seoul (Agenzia Fides) – To pray for reconciliation and to start up economic cooperation again between North and South Korea: with this spirit His Exc. Mgr. Andrew Yeom Soo-jung celebrated yesterday, 21 July, a Mass with company owners and employees that are situated in the industrial area of Kaeseong, on the border of the two Koreas.

As reported to Fides by the Secretariat of the Archdiocese, the Holy Mass, celebrated in the Chapel inside the house of the Bishop, in Seoul, was offered with the intention of praying for the re-opening of the industrial region. The area, which was created in recent years as a sign of North-South cooperation, following an agreement between the governments of the two Koreas, has been facing an indefinite closure since April of 2013, due to the tension between North and South Korea. The Mass was concelebrated by Msgr. Choi Chang-hwa, Director of the "Committee for the Reconciliation of the Korean people" and the deputy director, Fr. Cheong Sae-deuk. It was attended by about 50 faithful lay Catholics, members of a community of workers in Kaeseong, who meet regularly to celebrate the Rosary and were invited to Mass with their families.

"The closure of the industrial region of Kaeseong has caused several damages. However, members of the 'Community of the Rosary' have never given up hope and have continued to meet, offering prayers for peace between North and South Korea. In this way, I wanted to offer them my support and comfort", explains Archbishop Yeom Soo-jung in a message sent to Fides. During his homily, the Archbishop praised the friendship and trust built between North and South Korea thanks to all the workers and the staff. The Archbishop also expressed his deep concerns and hopes for the talks between North and South Korea, which have not yet achieved any result. "The re-opening of the region of Kaeseong – he hoped - would not only be for economic reasons but also as a symbol of reconciliation to be achieved through a great deal of dialogue and good relations".

The "Community of the Rosary" is composed of over 40 members from 30 different companies. Because there is no religious freedom in the Kaeseong area, Catholics who work there do not have the opportunity to attend Mass. The Community was formed in 2008, when Catholics gathered spontaneously in a cafeteria and prayed the Rosary together. Since the area has been closed, meetings have been held in Seoul.

"Members of the community have interacted directly with workers from North Korea", explained Fr. Cheong Sae-deuk, the deputy director of the "Commission for the Reconciliation of the Korean people", which works in Seoul for humanitarian assistance to the North. "The members believe and treat North Korean citizens just like brothers. We earnestly hope that Kaeseong can re-open, so that this experience of fraternity can continue", he concluded. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 22/07/2013)