



ASIA/INDONESIA - President Yudhoyono: more commitment against intolerance and for religious freedom

Jakarta (Agenzia Fides) - Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono said he was concerned about the growing religious intolerance in Indonesia and promised that the country, champion of pluralism, will defend religious minorities and religious freedom. The issue of growing religious intolerance, which shook Indonesia last year, was the focus of the recent annual speech on behalf of the President to Parliament, which has a programmatic value for the government.

Given the occurrence of increasingly violent attacks against religious minorities, such as Christians, Muslims, Shiites and Ahmadis (small sect considered heretical by Islam), religious leaders in past months openly criticized the President, defining him "an accomplice of the climate of intolerance" and condemning the Government's inaction in preventing and stopping such attacks (see Fides 23/05/2013).

"I am very concerned about the continuing episodes of intolerance and conflict among communities", said Yudhoyono and said in his speech, sent to Fides.

"We need to be able to prevent them", he said, calling for a "collective responsibility of government and religious institutions".

"We cannot justify the imposition of religious beliefs on a minority", he said, adding that "every citizen must respect the Constitution which guarantees freedom of religion". Indonesia, he reiterated, is a pluralistic country that has always been champion of dialogue among civilizations and religions: this is why "it is urgent to avoid clashes and violence, which can disturb peace in our society and our national unity".

The President's comments come at a time when his administration is criticized for not having dammed cases of intolerance, which have increased steadily over the past four years. According to a report sent to Fides by the "Wahid Institute", which promotes pluralism and peaceful Islam, cases of religious intolerance in Indonesia were 274 in 2012, 267 in 2011, 184 in 2010 and 121 in 2009.

Yudhoyono, in office since 2004, ends his tenure in 2014.

According to analysts, a series of scandals for corruption that involved his government have made him lose a lot of popularity. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 24/08/2013)