



ASIA/MALAYSIA - Use of the word "Allah" for Christians: on September 10 the hearing for the government's appeal

Kuala Lumpur (Agenzia Fides) - The legal dispute on the use of the word "Allah" in Christian publications will be examined in the appeal hearing on September 10. As reported to Fides, this is the result of the decision of the Court of Appeal in Putrajaya, which validated the appeal filed by the Malaysian government. The appeal is against a judgment of 31 December 2009, which authorized Christians to use the word "Allah" in their publications in Malay language. About three years after that judgment, the question remained open and suspended. The Catholic Church, in the person of its representative, His Exc. Mgr. Murphy Pakiam, Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur, had asked the cancellation of the appeal submitted by the government (see Fides 18/07/2013). The validation by the Court now opens the path for a judgment on the issue that, according to the Catholic Church in Malaysia, touches the sphere of human rights and religious freedom. The trial will see the Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur on one side, as head of the Catholic weekly diocesan "Herald," and the Malaysian government on the other side.

Fr. Lawrence Andrew, director of the Herald, said that "the Church has never wanted to make a political case or a religious reason for conflict". But activists in "Perkasa" a Muslim nationalist organization, have tried to influence the judges and the case could easily be exploited. The Secretary-General of Perkasa, Syed Hassan Syed Ali, has called for "the unity of all Muslims in Malaysia for the cause of Allah". This has "fueled religious tensions by creating fear and confusion among the faithful Muslims, saying that the Church threatens the sanctity of Islam", notes Fr. Andrew, stressing that the Church "calls on the authorities to take action toward those who create instability and unrest, exploiting the issue regarding the use of the word Allah".

Prime Minister Najib Razak in past days tried to reassure public opinion, saying that "Malaysia has not become an Islamic Orthodox state", the matter is that "it is important to understand the religious sensibilities of all".

The case broke out in 2008 when the Ministry of the Interior threatened to revoke the diocesan weekly in Kuala Lumpur, "Herald", the permission to use the term "Allah" in its publication, the only one that says "God" in the local Malay language.

This prompted the Catholic Church to initiate judicial proceedings. In 2009, the verdict of the Court gave reason to the Church, and the government presented the application for appeal which has so far remained suspended.

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