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# ASIA/PHILIPPINES - Violence in Zamboanga: Christians and Muslims in prayer with the displaced. A priest among the kidnapped

Zamboanga City (Agenzia Fides) - While the rebels of the "Moro National Liberation Front" (MNLF ) have been holed up for three days in an area of Zamboanga, on Mindanao island, with about 200 hostages, including Fr. Michael Ofana, a diocesan priest (see Fides 09/09/2013) , more than 15 thousand among displaced persons and citizens of Zamboanga, Christians and Muslims, gathered today in the city stadium for a great demonstration of prayer, to give the nation a message of peace. "We want to show the population and the authorities that Muslims and Christians today are united in this difficult moment for Zamboanga. This is not a religious war", explains Fr. Sebastiano D'Ambra, PIME missionary and founder of the movement for Islamic-Christian dialogue "Sisilah" (which means "chain" ), active in Zambanga for over 25 years.
The event, organized by "Sisilah", in collaboration with the interfaith forum "Interfaith Council of Leaders", intends to ask Filipino guerrillas and the army, "an immediate cease-fire, the release of hostages, negotiation based on dialogue".
"The situation is serious. At any moment the situation could worsen. Over 2,000 families have been evacuated, and a quarter of the city could be put to fire and sword. We hope for a peaceful solution and today we are gathered here for this", remarked the missionary. With regards to the new break out of violence, Fr. D'Ambra explains: "The MNLF of the historical leader Nur Misuari felt excluded from the peace talks between the government and the other rebel group, the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). Today, the MNLF claims a presence and intends to assert themselves by force. The fear is that in this stage of the crisis the terrorist group Abu Sayyaf may take advantage, which could promote terrorist acts, making the situation worse".
Fr. D'Ambra addresses a special thought to "the hostages held by rebels, to families worried about their loved ones who have been seized, to Fr. Michael Ofana, a Filipino priest of the diocese, who is among the prisoners. We hope to embrace them all soon, safe and sound. We entrust them to the protection of the Virgin Mary". (PA) (Agenzia Fides 12/09/2013)

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