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ASIA/PHILIPPINES - Air strikes on rebels in Zamboanga: Bishops of Mindanao ask for a cease-fire

Zamboanga (Agenzia Fides) - While government forces have launched air strikes on rebels of the "Moro National Liberation Front" (MNLF), holed up with more than 100 hostages in a district of Zamboang , a city on the island of Mindanao, in the extreme south of the Philippines, displaced citizens have risen to 70 thousand and are in centers of assistance in the area. According to local sources, the first toll of four days of fighting, since the government of Manila has chosen "the military option" to solve the crisis, is of 62 dead, of whom 51 guerrillas and 5 civilians.
Bishops and civil society in Mindanao ask for an immediate "cease-fire" and appeal to the government forces and rebels to find a peaceful solution to the conflict. In a joint statement sent to Fides Agency, the 18 Archbishops and bishops of the island call on the government and the MNLF "to urgently open a negotiating table and to dialogue", given that "armed clashes generates more victims and violence". Since the beginning of the siege, Zamboanga is "virtually paralyzed" and the people "are in a state of terror", the Bishops noted . "We are deeply saddened and shocked by this terrible tragedy to human life and property of many families. We express our solidarity with all Muslims and Christians affected, they say. "We condemn terrorism that has been inflicted on an entire city. We condemn the inhumane act of using hostages as human shields", they added, calling for full availability of the Church to assist the displaced persons and also encouraging the local administration and non-governmental organizations to contribute actively to assisting refugees. The Bishops finally agree of involving "other Muslim, Christians religious leaders and indigenous people to pray and work for peace". (PA) (Agenzia Fides 16/09/2013)

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