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ASIA/MALAYSIA - Use of the word "Allah": appeal verdict unfavorable to Christians . "It violates religious freedom"

Kuala Lumpur (Agenzia Fides) - The Court of Appeal in Kuala Lumpur, with a judgment delivered this morning, has prohibited the use of the term "Allah" to indicate "God" in the publications of the Catholic weekly "Herald", of the Diocese of Kuala Lumpur. The verdict overturns the judgment of a court of first instance which dates back to December 31, 2009.
At the time, the weekly had filed a court case, claiming their right to use the word "Allah", that a government provision prohibited, considering the term a prerogative for Muslims.
Strong disappointment among Malaysian Christians for a sentence judged "unfair". Asked by Fides Agency, Fr. Lawrence Andrew, Director of the weekly "Herald Malaysia", said: "We are disappointed, because the verdict violates a right to religious freedom and freedom of expression enshrined in the Constitution. 'Allah' is a term widely used by Arab Christians, all over the world and has been in the Bible in Malaysian language for 400 years".
Fr. Andrew announces that "in accordance with the Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur, editor of the weekly Herald, we will appeal to the Supreme and Federal Court". According to the Director, the ruling "was obviously influenced by political pressure". The judgment, however, "is limited to the publication of weekly Herald, therefore it does not affect the Bible and Christian liturgies".
While outside the courtroom there were demonstrations of militants belonging to the Islamic party "Perkasa", Fr. Andrew announces that "all Malaysian Christians will live in coming days a prayer vigil, to pray for peace and religious freedom in Malaysia". The Director recalled that an ancient Latin - Malay Dictionary, published by the Congregation of "Propaganda Fide" in 1631, represents "the litmus test on the use of the word Allah, legitimate for Christians".
Out of the approximately 28 million inhabitants, mainly Muslim majority (60%), Christians in Malaysia are over 2.6 million. Among these, the indigenous Christians, who use the local language (and therefore call God "Allah") to worship, are mainly in the provinces of Sabah and Sarawak (Malaysian Borneo) and are about 1.6 million believers. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 14/10/2013)

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