



ASIA/MALAYSIA - The Premier: "Christians in Borneo can use the term Allah"; the Bishops criticize the "misinformed judges"

Kota Kinabalu (Agenzia Fides) - The Prime Minister of Malaysia Najib Razak said that the Christians of Malaysian Borneo - ie those residing in the states of Sabah and Sarawak - can continue to use the term "Allah" during prayers. As reported to Fides, Razak's public declaration, who is on a visit in the state of Sabah, plans to put end to the misleading interpretations which have been spread in society, after the judgment of the Court of Appeal in Kuala Lumpur, regarding the controversy with the Catholic weekly "Herald". The verdict established the prohibition of the use of the word "Allah" for the Christian newspaper. The Premier stated that the decision of the Court of Appeal has no impact for the worship of Christians in the two states, adding that his government intends to comply with the Memorandum of Understanding on 10 points drawn up in 2011, which found practical solutions to the issue. Razak urged "not to politicize the issue", which would mean "playing with fire" stressing the importance of peace and harmony, which is built "through good relations among all religious communities". Even the government of the province of Sarawak has confirmed the legitimacy of the local Christians to use the word "Allah" in rituals and in the Bible. The Association of Churches in Sarawak agreed, saying that "a ban would be for us a serious blow to religious freedom".

His Exc. Mgr. Murphy Pakiam, Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur and President of the Bishops' Conference of Malaysia expressed his opinion regarding the issue, noting that "the three judges were seriously misinformed", in affirming that "the word Allah is not essential or is not an integral part of Christianity". In a note sent to Fides, Mgr. Pakiam remembers the first article of the "Creed", which reads "I believe in one God, the Father Almighty", saying that "a Christian cannot modify in any way his profession of faith, otherwise he would incur heresy". And, in order to translate "one God" in the Malay language, there is no other word than "Allah". To prohibit such use, he explained, is "a serious denial of a fundamental right of the indigenous Christian community". In the states of Sabah and Sarawak, home to 1.6 million native Christians, most of the churches and chapels carry out liturgies and catechesis in "Bahasa Malaysia". The Catholic Church has confirmed that, on the case, it will resort to the Federal Court. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 23/10/2013)