



ASIA/PHILIPPINES – After two years, Fr. Fausto Tentorio's murder goes unpunished

Kidapawan (Agenzia Fides) - Two years since the murder of PIME missionary Fr. Fausto Tentorio, the crime goes unpunished. The missionary was killed on October 17, 2011 at his parish in Arakan, in the province of North Cotabato, on the island of Mindanao (southern Philippines). And investigations - note local sources of Fides - are "at sea". "We try to keep the hope of justice alive", said the Bishop of Kidapawan, Mgr. Romulo de la Cruz, during the Eucharistic celebration on the occasion of the second anniversary of the missionary's death.

"We continue to pray and hope", urged the Bishop, recalling the Gospel passage that reads "Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds". As Fides learns, the celebration was attended by over a thousand people, including parishioners, indigenous people, activist groups and associations that cry out for justice.

So far, the activists note, evidence against the suspects have not been filed. As local sources of Fides report, the investigation of crime is stranded in a forest of contradictory and false leads. Three witnesses who had indicated, among the authors of the crime, the brothers Jose and Dimas Sampulna have retracted, and are free from blame. After retraction, Gregory Andolana, lawyer of the Diocese of Kidapawan, called for further investigations. Among the suspects are the brothers Jimmy and Robert Ato, arrested in December 2011, and five members of the paramilitary group "Bagan", led by Jan Corbala, also known as "Commander Iring". The Ato brothers, however, are now free from blame thanks to another eyewitness, who had previously accused them .

Fr. Fausto's confrere, Fr. Peter Geremia, PIME is convinced that "someone is trying to block or deflect investigations", and raises suspicions about the paramilitary groups that patrol the area . They, however, said in a statement sent to Fides , "seem untouchable". "We continue to defy a system of impunity and a system of corruption", stresses the missionary, explaining that his commitment "is for Fr. Fausto but also for the other victims of extrajudicial executions". Fr. Tentorio was known for his work of wanting to raise awareness and development of indigenous peoples, for his work in defense of human rights and environmental protection. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 23/10/2013)