



## **ASIA/PHILIPPINES - Proposal to the Government: an "Islamic triumvirate" to unblock peace in the southern Philippines**

Zamboanga del Sud (Agenzia Fides) - To end the stalemate regarding peace negotiations in the South of the Philippines "the solution could be to create, for the new 'Bangsamoro region' - Autonomous Region for Muslim communities - a sort of triumvirate, a government composed of three representatives, taking into account the main ethnic and cultural components of the Muslim community on the island of Mindanao": is the proposal launched through Fides by Fr. Sebastiano D'Ambra, PIME missionary who has been living in the southern Philippines for 35 years, the founder of the Center for Muslim-Christian dialogue "Silsilah" in Zamboanga city, and has a deep knowledge of the reality of Filipino Islam.

While the government of Benigno Aquino had reached a peace agreement with the rebel group "Moro Islamic Liberation Front" (MILF), the situation has plummeted in recent times, with the new violent action of another Muslim rebel group, the "Moro National Liberation Front" (MNLF), which in September 2013 launched a military offensive in the center of Zamboanga. The action had serious consequences at a social (more than 100 thousand refugees), economic, political and religious level, "moving back the clock of peace", the missionary said. Fr. D'Ambra explains in an interview with Fides: "The new rebellion of the MNLF also depends on the fact that the movement felt left out and claims visibility and power in the design of the new political- institutional Muslim region. The two rebel movements are an expression of different ethnic-cultural groups: the MNLF is formed by the Muslims of ethnic Tausug, the MILF by the Maguindanao: In addition to the community of 6 million Filipino Muslims there is a third major component, the group of Maranao, alongside other minority tribes". To give all Muslim groups the belief that the different ethnic groups, cultures, and customs will be respected, "the idea of a share of the government among three members (the triumvirate), representing the three major tribes, could be successful", notes the missionary. Fr. D'Ambra told Fides that the government will forward the proposal to the Office responsible for the peace process, led by the Catholic Teresita Deles.

Meanwhile, in recent days in Cotabato (Mindanao) the "Bangsamoro transition Commission" - a body appointed by the government and the MILF to draft the Basic Law for the new region - has signed an agreement with the "Platform for Peace in civil society in Mindanao", which includes more than 120 among organizations, groups and networks in the area. The agreement includes a commitment to create a sort of "popular referendum" before the entry into force of the new Law. The agreement aims to promote "transparency, inclusion and active participation of local actors to generate massive support to the Bangsamoro Basic Law". The new "Bangsamoro region" should replace the "Autonomous Muslim Region of Mindanao", created 23 years ago, by 30 June 2016. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 24/10/2013)