



## **ASIA/MYANMAR - Buddhist protest against the visit of the Organization of the Islamic Conference**

Yangon (Agenzia Fides) - "Muslims go away!": With this slogan hundreds of Burmese citizens of Buddhist religion in Myanmar today welcomed the arrival of a delegation from the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), the body representing 57 Islamic countries in the world. As reported by Fides sources, the protest is spreading like wildfire, to the cry of "no to outside interference". The OIC delegation, led by Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu Secretary General arrives in Myanmar today to talk to the Government about the issue of sectarian violence perpetrated by the Buddhist population on Islamic minorities. According to official estimates, last year over 240 people (mostly Muslims) were killed and another 240,000 were forced to flee their homes and are crowded in refugee camps, especially in the Rakhine State. According to the program, the OIC team - which includes representatives from Indonesia, Malaysia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Djibouti and Bangladesh - will travel to the Rakhine State, to meet with the leaders of the local Muslim communities, and displaced persons in refugee camps. The authorities fear new explosions of protest, especially by radical Buddhist movements: this is why demonstrations have been prohibited in the Rakhine State and the police have stepped up measures, denying the entry to foreign journalists.

A resurgence of religious violence was also recorded in recent weeks in western Myanmar, near Thandwe, a few hours before the visit of President Thein Sein, which sought to cool tensions. According to police, a crowd of Buddhists attacked the Muslim area, setting fire to dozens of houses, killing some people.

Meanwhile Buddhist nationalist groups call for a boycott of Muslim stores and Buddhist monks feed radical anti-Muslim sentiments across the country. A recent report by the International Crisis Group (ICG), confirms "deep anti-Muslim sentiments in Myanmar" and notes "the inadequate response of the security forces". Muslims account for about 4% of the approximately 60 million people in Myanmar. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 13/11/2013)