



ASIA/PHILIPPINES - Profiteering traffickers and pedophiles on the orphaned children of Typhoon Haiyan

Manila (Agenzia Fides) - They are already called "orphans of Yolanda" (the name of the Philippine Typhoon Haiyan, ed). There are thousands of children who have become orphans after the storm that struck the province of Leyte. And they are the most vulnerable victims, as they find themselves alone, wandering through the rubble, looking for someone to take care of them.

"These children are the main victims of jackals who seize them for child abuse or human trafficking. It is a horrible prospect, but it is extremely realistic in the case of natural disasters. These children are in need of immediate attention, to be saved from the clutches of traffickers and pedophiles": this is the complaint launched to Fides Agency by Fr. Shay Cullen, SSC, a missionary from San Colombano, who has been living in the Philippines since 1969, known for his social and pastoral commitment, especially for child victims of sexual exploitation. The missionary explains the phenomenon to Fides: "Under the pretext of saving or taking care of children, traffickers kidnap them and sell them to pedophiles. Or they earn large sums of money by providing the children for illegal adoptions. Even worse, they introduce them into the world of prostitution, making them slaves of sexual exploitation".

As Fides learns, the Philippine authorities are aware of the risk and are monitoring the phenomenon in the post -typhoon Haiyan phase. The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) of the Philippine government, in fact, has already sent an urgent message to all humanitarian workers engaged in Leyte, pointing out "the high risk of child trafficking" in the areas devastated by the typhoon. The little ones will go down in history as "the lost children of Yolanda".

"Given the wide devastation, it is expected that the hunger emergency and the plight of the refugees will last many months", says Fr. Cuellen. It is the ideal situation for jackals. "We must do everything possible to stop child trafficking. Our association 'Preda Foundation' - he concludes - has sent skilled social workers in the affected area to help protect and take care of homeless children".

Human trafficking and child prostitution is a social problem in the Philippines. Human trafficking is controlled by criminal organizations rooted in the whole national territory, and the country is at the top of world rankings for the extent of the phenomenon. According to UNICEF, it is estimated that children victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation in the country are between 60 and 100 thousand. The victims, mostly from poor villages in remote areas of the metropolis, are often promised, by deception, a path of education or life in a wealthy family in a big city. Child prostitution records a major impact especially in tourist areas of the Philippines. Among the main causes of the phenomenon, as indicated by UNICEF, are poverty, economic and social disadvantage in communities of origin, lack of access to public services such as childhood education and healthcare. In 2003, the Philippine government enacted the Anti- Trafficking in Persons Act, a criminal law against human trafficking, sex tourism, sexual slavery and child prostitution, which defines child trafficking "crime against humanity". (PA) (Agenzia Fides 14/11/2013)