



## **ASIA/PHILIPPINES - Bishops and Ulema of Mindanao are offered to mediate in the peace process**

Zamboanga (Agenzia Fides) - Bishops and Muslim ulemas propose themselves as actors in dialogue and negotiation for the Southern Philippines: This is what emerged from the 41st meeting between Bishops and Ulema (Islamic religious leaders) in Mindanao, held recently in Zamboanga. As reported to Fides, the summit was hosted by the "Sisilah" Movement for Dialogue, which started in the southern Philippines thanks to Sebastiano D'Ambra, a PIME missionary. 22 religious leaders took part in the conference, Catholics, Protestants and Muslims from places like Cagayan, Lanao, Cotabato, Pagadian, all locations on the island of Mindanao. The conference was organized in response to the crisis that Zamboanga crossed after the followers of the "Moro National Liberation Front" (MNLF) rebel movement attacked the city on 9 September. The bishop emeritus of Davao, Msgr. Fernando Capalla, as representative of the Catholic bishops, Protestant Bishop Danilo Bustamante and prof. Salipada Tamano, leader of the "League of Ulemas" signed at the conclusion of the summit, a joint statement entitled "Dialogue and hope: the key to peace". The violence perpetrated by the rebels - reads the note sent to Fides - "is inhumane, non-Christian, non-Islamic and contrary to the teachings of our respective faiths, therefore, unacceptable".

In the text, the religious leaders want to be involved in the negotiations for peace, expressing a desire to get to the bottom of the problems. For this reason they pose some questions: why was the 1996 agreement between the Philippine government and the MNLF not implemented? Why are the different rebel groups who call themselves "Islamic" not united ?

Bishop Capalla at the end of the meeting said: "Muslims and Christians, we are a family. As religious leaders we do not have police powers, but we can bring together different groups to talk, we are not perfect and we will try to improve our leadership, focusing on common values". (PA) (Agenzia Fides 20/11/2013)