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AMERICA/COLOMBIA - FARC "authorize" the opening of churches in the south of the country, but only on Sundays

Mocoa (Agenzia Fides) - In the Colombian department of Putumayo in the south of the country, FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) allow churches to open only on Saturdays and Sundays and priests therefore can celebrate Mass only in these two days. The complaint comes from the Bishop of the Diocese of Mocoa - Sibundoy, capital of the department of Putumayo, His Exc. Mgr. Luis Alberto Parra Mora, who speaking to a local radio station said that "in the beginning it was forbidden for the entire week", but after the request of the inhabitants of the town of Puerto Guzmán and Puerto Asís, the guerrilla allowed Mass to be celebrated at the weekend. "We are now in the process of dialogue with armed groups that have allowed us to come back to celebrate the Eucharist in these cities, but we still cannot go to the rural area, where the churches are closed all week", said the Archbishop.
Although FARC and the government of President Juan Manuel Santos have continued peace talks in Cuba since 2012, the armed conflict in the country continues unabated. In the same area of Putumayo, six priests threatened by the guerrillas have been transferred recently for security reasons (see Fides 17/10/2013) .
"We view with concern the security issues of our priests and our Bishops, who are denied the freedom to preach the Word of God", said Father Pedro Mercado, deputy secretary of the Colombian Episcopal Conference.
During the long history of armed conflict, hostility against the Church on behalf of guerillas and other groups have been constant, however, as pointed out by Fr. Mercado, this problem has increased in recent months.
According to the new program, on Thursday, November 28th dialogue between FARC and the government on the third point of the peace agreements should start. Initially the meeting was set for November 17, as announced after the news of the second agreement (see Fides 08/11/2013), but then the date was postponed to November 28 "to exchange documents and analyze other new proposals received from different groups of the Colombian society", according to a statement of EFE agency. (CE) (Agenzia Fides 26/11/2013)

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