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OCEANIA/PAPUA NEW GUINEA - Fight against witchcraft: the vital contribution of Churches

Goroka (Agenzia Fides) - In the fight concerning beliefs and practices of witchcraft, a plague which afflicts Papua New Guinea, the contribution of the Churches is crucial for bringing about real change in people's mentality. Christian Churches have a vital role to carry out, alongside and together with other institutions such as the government, school and public health services. This was stated in a note sent to Fides by Fr. George Licini, of the Communications Office of the Episcopal Conference of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands.
Recently, a national conference was held with regards to the phenomenon of witchcraft, in the presence of experts, priests, theologians and civic leaders, held at the University of Goroka. Among the participants, Fr. Franco Zocca, SVD, a professor at the "Melanesian Institute", said: "Christianity in Papua New Guinea has so far failed to eradicate the belief that magic and witchcraft exist because of disease, natural disasters and death". It is urgent, therefore, to develop a "national response" in order to overcome the current mentality. It must be said that even in Europe until centuries ago, especially during epidemics of plague, people were accused of causing illness and death through witchcraft. "In modern Papua New Guinea, the situation is the same and many Christian leaders continue to believe that illness, death and disasters are caused by witchcraft", notes Fr. Zocca. The accusations and prosecutions against suspected sorcerers in the West ceased only after scientific and medical discoveries explained the natural causes of the disease. Based on this experience, the conference in Goroka invites Churches to operate effectively, in addition to public institutions, to eradicate the esoteric beliefs. When it comes to "beliefs", in fact theology has an important role to play. "The Christian faith in the power of Jesus Christ is, in fact – concludes Fr. Licini - the most powerful antidote to counter such demonic beliefs". (PA) (Agenzia Fides 02/01/2014)

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