



## **ASIA/INDONESIA - Christian politicians: "Remove one's religious belief from identity cards"**

Jakarta (Agenzia Fides) - It is time to remove one's religious belief from identity cards: is the proposal made by Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, a Christian politician who has the important role of lieutenant governor of the district in the capital Jakarta. As reported to Fides, the proposal has sparked much debate in the country because it touches a "taboo": it is mandatory in the country for every citizen to belong to one of the five recognized religions (Islam, Christianity, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism or Confucianism) and this can be seen on one's identity card. Among other things, some scholars note, the duty of choosing among the five recognized religions has led millions of Indonesian citizens - scattered in 17 thousand islands of a vast and plural archipelago - to be called officially "Muslim", while, de facto, they follow and practice traditional, indigenous or ancestral religions. By eliminating the fact of obligatory declaring one's religion would contribute, therefore, to redefining the religious aspect of the Indonesian nation today.

Lieutenant governor Tjahaja Purnama, a Christian, a native of South Sumatra, is a figure that already in past months was criticized by fringe Islamists who refused to be subdued to an official of Christian religion. "If tolerance is the key to freedom of religion - said Basuki Tjahaja Purnama - for the future growth in Indonesia one must have the courage to change a rule which is now outdated". Removing it, in fact, means ensuring equality and eliminating discrimination often suffered by non-Muslims, even in schools and government jobs. Some Muslim leaders have expressed opposite opinions: according to Tubagus Robbyansyah, president of the Jakarta section of "Nahdlatul Ulama" Islamic organization, "all Indonesian citizens have the right to declare their religion. And, by knowing everyone's religion, we can be tolerant". Even the federal Deputy Minister for Religious Affairs, Nasaruddin Umar said that keeping an indication of one's faith on the identity card of every citizen is important, for example, "to prevent illegal interfaith marriages". (PA) (Agenzia Fides 04/01/2013)