



ASIA/PHILIPPINES - An Interfaith Council established by the Commune of Zamboanga City

Zamboanga city (Agenzia Fides) - The City Council of Zamboanga City, a city on the island of Mindanao, has approved an ordinance that establishes a special "Interfaith Council of the city". The ordinance creates the new body recognizing the urgent need for "a policy of peace, cooperation and friendship in the Philippines" and reiterating "the individual right to freedom of religion and worship".

As reported to Fides, the new Council will have the function of formulating recommendations to the City Council in order to adopt pluralistic and non-discriminatory policy initiatives; maintain ties with various religious organizations of civil society, facilitate and promote interfaith activities in the fabric of the city. The body will have an annual budget of 2 million pesos.

The 20 members of the Council are: the mayor, the Archbishop of Zamboanga City, representatives of the major Islamic organizations, of churches, of indigenous peoples. Among the components, there will also be a member of the "Silsilah" movement for dialogue, who has been working for years to promote interfaith dialogue in the area. The movement, in a note sent to Fides, praised the initiative as a "step forward towards harmony". The Council will be immediately involved in promoting "interfaith harmony Week", which is celebrated every year in Mindanao during the first week of February.

According to current demographic data, Zamboanga City, among its approximately 800 thousand inhabitants, has about 600 thousand Christians (more than 70 % of the population), while the remaining 30 % of the population is divided between Muslims, Indians and a small minority of other religions.

The attack on September 9 in Zamboanga City carried out by the rebels of the "Moro National Liberation Front" (MNLF) (see Fides12 and 13/09/2013) - says the note of the "Silsilah" movement - "does not stem from interfaith difficulty, but has created discomfort among Christian groups and Muslims residing in the city". The new body will try to tone down the tensions and rebuild civil harmony in the community. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 08/01/2014)