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ASIA/MALAYSIA - "Allah" issue: burning Fr. Andrew's portrait is equivalent "to an attack against Christians"

Kuala Lumpur (Agenzia Fides) - Christians must remain strong in their faith, in dealing with the attacks carried out by Islamist groups on the use of the word "Allah" for worship; accusations, denunciations, intimidation and the act of burning Fr. Andrew Lawrence's portrait, Director of the Catholic weekly Herald, "is tantamount to an attack against the Catholic community": says Msg. Murphy Pakiam, Archbishop Emeritus of Kuala Lumpur, now administrator of the archdiocese, in a pastoral letter dedicated to the issues of justice and peace.
Fr. Andrew was accused for claiming that "in the worship of the Catholic faithful the use the word Allah to refer to God is allowed" (see Fides 09/01/2014). In past days, moreover , the priest was the victim of heavy death threats.
In the text of the letter, sent to Fides Agency, the Archbishop said: "The Catholic Church is always at the forefront for justice and peace. As citizens, our actions have always been respectful of the law, guaranteed by the Federal Constitution, to practice our faith without interference and intimidation". Fearing a possible Violent drift, especially against Fr. Andrew, Msg. Pakiam notes. "It is deplorable that some groups want to organize demonstrations. These actions cause great discomfort, anxiety and even anger among Malaysian citizens. In addition, the approval of such actions on behalf of some political leaders and the inexplicable silence of others adds fuel to the fire, which seems to be spreading uncontrollably".
The Archbishop launches a warning to politics and society: "We cannot accept or tolerate that certain groups promote division, discord and disharmony in society. I urge the Catholic faithful to be strong and to continue to profess their faith with courage and determination. I find comfort in seeing Malaysians of all races and religions who join us in the cause of justice and peace".
I thank for the support "of those who are helping to make Malaysia a place where communities can live together in peace, enjoying the common values among religions but also differences", the Archbishop recalls: "As priests and laity we are called to promote justice and peace. Therefore we pray for Fr. Andrew Lawrence and let us commit ourselves to dialogue, building bridges of reconciliation by opposing those who use religion to divide the nation".
The Church asks authorities to "take the necessary measures to prevent further provocative acts of intimidation against minorities". Finally - the text concludes - "let us not forget to pray for our enemies, who have misunderstood our faith". (PA) (Agenzia Fides 20/01/2014)

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