



ASIA/BRUNEI - Christian Faith forbidden in Christian schools if there are Muslim children

Brunei (Agenzia Fides) - Principals and teachers in schools and private educational institutions in Brunei risk five years in prison and a fine of up to \$ 20,000 if they teach or speak to a Muslim child of religions other than Islam. As Fides learned, for the new Penal Code, based on the "Sharia" (Islamic law), which will come into force in April, it is a crime "to persuade, influence, incite, encourage a child with non- Islamic teaching". It is a crime to also "expose the child to any ceremony or act of worship which is not Islamic or allow the child to participate in activities for the benefit of other religions".

As reported to Fides by the local Church, the measure and the restrictions concern Christian schools also attended by Muslim students: Christian schools, in fact, guarantee quality education, free from all forms of proselytism. Brunei will introduce the new law in several phases: the first phase will regard offenses punishable by fines or imprisonment, the second phase will regard the application of more severe punishment, such as the amputation of limbs for theft . In the third phase the death penalty will come into force.

The Catholic Church in the small sultanate - where there is an Apostolic Vicariate led by Archbishop Cornelius Sim, with three parish churches, three priests and about 20 thousand Catholics - said he hoped that the provisions of the Shariah will be applied only to Muslim citizens. The "Sharia", in fact, is generally limited to Muslims, but can be extended to non-Muslims if they are complicit in a crime committed by a Muslim (PA) (Agenzia Fides 06/03/2014)