



ASIA/SOUTH KOREA - The Cardinal of Seoul visits North Korea

Seoul (Agenzia Fides) - Cardinal Andrew Yeom Soo-jung, Archbishop of Seoul, is the first Roman Catholic Cardinal to set foot in North Korea: today, May 21, the Archbishop crossed the border and made a brief visit to the Kaesong industrial area, an area where, according to an agreement between the two states, there are businesses and industries where citizens of North and South Korea work side by side. As Fides learns, the aim of Card. Yeom's short trip, who is also Apostolic Administrator of Pyongyang, was to visit the complex (which is a sign of the North-South cooperation) and to meet the South Koreans who work there, leaving them a message of encouragement and hope.

While relations between the two Koreas have been very tense again since last March, a spokesman for the Ministry of Unification of Korea in Seoul, said: "We hope that the Archbishop's visit is a positive move" to improve relations between the North and South. The ministry has denied media speculation that the trip could be carried out in order to prepare a possible visit of Pope Francis in North Korea during his next pilgrimage in South Korea, from August 14 to 18. Pope Francis will participate in the Asian Youth Day and will preside the rite of beatification of 124 Korean martyrs.

The industrial area in Kaesong, which is situated just across the border, is the latest project of cross-border rapprochement between the two Koreas which, technically, after the armistice signed in 1953, are still in a state of war. In April 2013, the Kaesong area had been closed because of bilateral tension. In July 2013, the Archbishop had celebrated a special Mass for reconciliation, praying for the reopening of the project.

In January, 2014, at the time of his appointment as cardinal, the Archbishop had told Fides Agency: "Through this call of God, I pray and give my full support to the evangelization of the Church in Asia, particularly of China and North Korea".

The South Korean Church holds a channel of communication open with North Korea through Caritas, which regularly organizes humanitarian missions across the border. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 21/05/2014)