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AsiaNews (21.03.2012) / HRWF (22.03.2012) - www.hrwf.net - For the first time in its history, North Korea wants to meet religious delegations from South Korea. The meeting should take place in China and include talks with the North's four authorized groups, namely the " Chosun Christian Alliance, Chosun Religious Council, Chosun Catholic Council and Chosun Buddhist Alliance," South Korea's Unification Ministry said in response to Pyongyang's announcement.

Like China, North Korea views Catholics and Christians as separate religions rather than groups that differ in terms of theology and their attitude towards the pope.

Even so, since North Korea totally lacks religious freedom, its religious delegations are made up of government officials. This way, the regime can claim that "religious pluralism" exists in the country.

For various sources that spoke to AsiaNews, this meeting is a ploy. "The regime is not interested in religious freedom and is incapable of understanding the latter's spiritual significance."

"Hunger is a major problem in the North, and South Korean religious groups are the most active in provide food and health care. For this reason, after allegedly pledging to stop their nuclear activities to obtain US aid, Pyongyang now wants to get aid this way too."

The meeting itself could take place before the end of the month, either in Beijing or Shenyang, depending on what the Chinese decide.

Some 14 delegations are expected from South Korea. However, "there has been no final acceptance from the relevant department," the Unification Ministry said. Yet, "if the suggestion is reviewed positively by those religious groups and fits their schedules then we would expect to accept it."
