



AFRICA/CHAD - "Religions should work for peace and reconciliation," Bishops of Chad say

N'Djamena (Agenzia Fides) – An invitation to all religious leaders to engage in the search for peace and national reconciliation has been made by the Bishops of Chad. "Through the Synod of Bishops for Africa, we became aware that reconciliation is a common task to be performed with others for the good of the country. Consequently, we, as Bishops of Chad, call on all religious leaders to engage in an honest search for ways and means to promote reconciliation and to ensure that areas of civil debate are not confused with areas of religious debate," the Bishops of Chad said in their Christmas Message, which has only now reached Fides.

The urgency of national reconciliation is recognized in the document: "Our recent history teaches us that Chad has not known a year of calm since its independence (1960). The country rapidly entered into a cycle of violence that culminated in the civil war in February 1979. Since then, several regional or ethnic groups have had violent and consistent confrontations for several reasons.

Over the years, "successive changes of regime have not reduced the inter-community clashes or armed rebellions, and fratricidal death. They have also established practices and unacceptable behavior for a constitutional state: permanent insecurity, uncontrolled circulation of weapons, and violation of human rights."

Thus, the bishops note, there has been a growing mistrust among Chadians and divisions have widened on the basis of ethnicity or region of origin. The various attempts at reconciliation have failed, as "the activity of political elites and military leaders who often act as individuals, for their personal interest, or for that of their ethnicity. Some actors, manipulated by outside powers, come to the negotiating table only for power, without any social project to propose or to defend."

The Bishops' Conference of Chad also says that the "flow of money generated from the exploitation of oil, instead of solving our problems of development has caused corruption, favoritism, and the transfer of public funds with total impunity."

According to them, despite the bleak picture, there are conditions that can lead Chad towards peace and national reconciliation. First, "the central geographical location of Chad and its cultural and religious affinity with neighboring countries are opportunities we can take better advantage of than in the past to promote regional integration in order to benefit all the peoples of the countries in the region." Also in Chad there is no lack of "men who are brave and wholesome such as South Africans Nelson Mandela, Frederick De Klerk, and Desmond Tutu," who managed to convince the extremists of their own party to join the national reconciliation process.

Action is needed in the political, social, and religious spheres. Politicians must be the initiators of the process of peace in society and it should be everybody's effort to exit the trap of regionalism and ethnicity. On the religious level it should be noted that each religion has its origin, and its aim is man's encounter with God." (L.M.)

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