



AFRICA/NIGERIA - "The accounts of the fighting's origin are mistaken," Archbishop of Jos tells Fides

Jos (Agenzia Fides) - "The accounts that have been published so far on the origin of the fighting are mistaken. In particular, it is not true that a church was attacked and burned," Archbishop Ignatius Ayau Kaigama of Jos, the capital of Plateau State (central Nigeria), told Agenzia Fides after 3 days of serious clashes that have caused hundreds of casualties. "Another version reported by the press says that the spark that caused the clashes was the attack on the yard of a house under construction belonging to a Muslim. But this should also be verified," says the Archbishop of Jos.

According to Archbishop Kaigama, the causes of violence are to be found in ethnic and political factors, more than religious: "the origin of the conflicts of today, like those of November 2008, are the contrasts between the Hausa, of Muslim beliefs, and the indigenous peoples, mainly Christians, who struggle for political control of the city."

Archbishop Kaigama, contacted by Fides on his way to attending a meeting with local authorities and Muslim religious leaders, says: "I hope that this meeting will serve to clarify the situation and assess the damage, as well as to ascertain the exact number of victims. There are still several circumstances that must be clarified. For example, the use (in the clashes) of sophisticated weapons that we still do not know where they come from." The violence broke out in Jos on January 17. The number of victims is uncertain and the army has imposed curfew hours. Jos was the scene of serious intra-community clashes in the recent past. In September 2001, bloody clashes broke out during which churches and mosques were burned, causing 915 deaths. Violence erupted again in November 2008, killing at least 400 people.

The unrest in the Plateau State of Nigeria is taking place in the midst of a political crisis resulting from the absence of President Umaru Yar'Adua, who was hospitalized in November in Saudi Arabia for heart problems. The opposition held demonstrations recently, to call for more information on the health of the President and on who is actually ruling the country. (L.M.) (Agenzia Fides 20/1/2010)