



AFRICA/SUDAN - "Sudan can find the path to peace through a complete application of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement," Nuncio in Sudan tells Fides

Rome (Agenzia Fides) - "2010 and 2011 are decisive years for Sudan's history. I am convinced that there is concrete hope for peace, as in recent months there have been positive developments seen in Southern Sudan and in Darfur," Archbishop Leo Boccardi, Apostolic Nuncio in Sudan and Eritrea tells Agenzia Fides.

"I do not deny that there are still difficulties to overcome, the insecurity in several areas of the country, corruption, tribal conflicts, but I think that if the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) is applied in its entirety, Sudan will regain peace," said Archbishop Boccardi. The CPA, signed in Nairobi in 2005, stipulates that elections will take place in April this year, to vote for the President, Parliament and the Governors. The same will take place to elect these same posts in Southern Sudan (President, Governors, and Parliament) which, according to the CPA, has a large autonomy. Finally in 2011, a referendum on the independence of South Sudan is planned to take place.

According to Archbishop Boccardi, the situation in Darfur is improving. "The humanitarian emergency that some feared when the government in Khartoum expelled several NGOs from the Western region has not come to pass. They have been replaced by Arab NGOs and there is a process of people's return to their villages." "The phase of military confrontation now seems to be overcome, as has also been confirmed by the leaders of the joint peacekeeping force of the UN-African Union, and the confrontation has shifted to the political plain, with the ongoing negotiations in Doha among the Khartoum government and representatives of guerrilla movements and civil society in Darfur." The Nuncio clarifies: "Of course, a certain degree of insecurity still remains, but this comes not so much from military action, as from the presence of bandits, who have found an easy source of income in the abduction of aid workers and Western officials."

As for Southern Sudan, tribal clashes and incursions of the LRA (Lord's Resistance Army) are the major factors that fuel the insecurity in several areas. In particular, one wonders how the LRA can be active for over 20 years now: who is funding this movement? How is it possible that the LRA has extended its incursions from northern Uganda, south Sudan, east of Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Central African Republic, despite the hunt being made for them?

Despite these difficulties, the Church in Southern Sudan continues to progress. "In Juba, the capital of Southern Sudan, the structures of the Church are consolidating in that area. We have created a Catholic University, the Major Seminary was reopened and the Catholic Secretariat, which had been transferred to Nairobi, Kenya, is about to return to Juba," said Archbishop Boccardi. "Even in other areas we see a ferment of the Catholic community, particularly young people who are eager to participate in the life of the Church. I attended the meeting of youth from the Diocese of Rumbek, on December 21-22. It was attended by 1,500 youth, and everything was held in a climate of maximum security. Even in Khartoum, the Catholic community is alive and there are no particular impediments for Catholics in living their faith."

"The message delivered by Pope Benedict XVI at the end of the Second Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops ("Church in Africa, stand up and walk in solidarity with the universal Church.") was well received by the Church of Sudan and Eritrea, which intends to continue her work of evangelization and human promotion, with her own efforts and with the help of the universal Church," concludes Archbishop Boccardi. (L.M.) (Agenzia Fides 22/1/2010)