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ASIA/SRI LANKA - "The Church is concerned, but has confidence in the authorities and in justice," President of the Bishops' Conference tells Fides

Colombo (Agenzia Fides) – The Church in Sri Lanka "which is acting in compliance with the institutions and has expressed its concern, is confident in the national legal system, without renouncing her prophetic role and proclaiming the values of peace and justice." This is what Agenzia Fides recently learned from Bishop Vianney Fernando of Kandy, President of the Bishops' Conference of Sri Lanka.
The Bishop refers to the state of tension that has been seen in the country recently, following the arrest of General Sarath Fonseka, leader of the opposition, who in the elections of January 26 had obtained 40% of the vote, compared to the 58% of current President Mahinda Rajapaksa. Fonseka was arrested on charges of plotting against the state: he is suspected of using part of the army, loyal to him, to subvert the established order.
Archbishop Fernando tells Fides: "The situation we are experiencing is not as alarming as some press reports say. It is mainly about respect for the law and democratic rules, which all citizens are required to follow. We believe that the President has been duly elected and is entitled to govern. The majority of citizens have cast a vote in his favor and, once the correctness of procedures and transparency of the electoral process are verified, everyone must accept the verdict of the elections."
The tension "is now sporadic and protests have been mainly generated by the clamor and the manner in which Fonseka was taken into custody: he was a senior servant of the state for 40 years, and thus should have his rights and dignity respected. We trust in the law and legal system in the nation," remarked the Bishop, while the President Rajapaksa has also assured that Fonseka may appeal to the Supreme Court against his arrest and all constitutional rights shall be guaranteed for him.
As for the presence and role of the Church and all Christians in this matter, the Bishop told Fides: "The Church continues to pray and to carry out her prophetic role. Some Catholic and Protestant Bishops, engaged in ecumenical dialogue, issued a public appeal which emphasizes their fears and expresses their wishes....For our part, as the Bishops' Conference, we express our concern to President Rajapaksa, reiterating the urgent need to work for reconciliation and unity of the nation, for progress, peace, and prosperity in Sri Lanka which, after the painful years of civil war, is so in need. We said this before the election and we reiterate it now."
As the Bishops' Conference, it is essential that we maintain good relations with the democratically constituted authorities, at all levels, by promoting the values of peace and justice," he remarked.
"Justice" today means concentrating on the Tamil minority: "The situation of IDPs is not yet fully resolved: the State must continue to work and Caritas is involved in the forefront of relief and reconstruction. The first need these people have is of peace, the absence of violence and a return to normal life. They should be guaranteed their dignity and well being." (PA) (Agenzia Fides 13/2/2010)

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