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ASIA/IRAQ - Christians in preparation for elections, amidst fears and hopes

Mosul (Agenzia Fides) – A flyer was posted yesterday on the door of Christians in Mosul: "Do not go to vote and do not elect Christians or you will die." In this climate of fear and tension, as local sources told Fides, the Christian community is approaching the elections of March 7. The violence of recent days has forced 870 Christian families to leave Mosul in a week and "others will flee in the days before the election, perhaps to return after the vote, when the situation has calmed down," note Fides sources.
The faithful still want to participate in parliamentary elections, in the hope that the vote will result in a better country, where stability, peace, and freedom reign. From a survey taken by Agenzia Fides, we see the clear desire of Iraqi Christians to stay in Iraq and continue working for the good of the nation, despite the difficulties of the present.
Direct engagement in politics is one of the methods they have chosen: of the approximately 6,200 candidates, spread over 306 listings, competing for 325 seats in Parliament, there are 48 Christian candidates who come in 6 specific lists (consisting only of Christian representatives). These candidates compete for 5 seats, which according to the present Constitution are reserved for Christian minorities in Parliament.
The "Two Rivers List" has 10 candidates. The “Assyrian Chaldean Syriac People's Council” presents 9. The "Chaldean Council" competes with 8 candidates. The "National Ur List” has 9, and the "Ishtar Democratic Coalition” has 10 names. There are also two independent candidates, which have individual listings. But besides these 48, there are three Christian names on the list of the Party of Prime Minister Al-Maliki.
Political activity and representation are considered a key tool in the struggle for the affirmation of the rights for Christian minorities in the context of Iraq. This is why political and religious leaders are insisting that believers, despite the fear and hesitation, come to the polls. "Participating is a duty, to show that the blood of Christians has not been shed in vain," said a source of Fides. "If Christian minorities abstain from voting, it is likely that the rights of Christians will not be recognized in the political arena, and that the Christian presence will end up being confined to radicalism and sectarianism. If believers do not vote, the criminals will have been successful in their efforts of intimidation and marginalization," Fides was told by Younadam Kanna, Christian Member of Parliament, and Secretary General of the “Assyrian Democratic Movement,” from the "Two Rivers List.”
Christians in Iraq currently number about 600,000. Before 2003, there were over 1.2 million in the country. However, the wave of violence has forced more than half of the believers to flee the area. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 3/3/2010)

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