



## **ASIA/IRAQ - Syrian Catholic Archbishop of Mosul tells Fides: Thousands of Christian families are fleeing Mosul, country needs unity**

Mosul (Agenzia Fides) - "Over a thousand Christian families have left Mosul in the past ten days, dispersing in the surrounding territory. All of these IDPs are not likely to participate in elections, as they are registered in Mosul. But, there is much to do: people are taken by fear and think about their safety." This is what Fides has learned in an interview with Archbishop Georges Casmoussa, Syrian Catholic Archbishop of Mosul, in light of the upcoming elections on March 7.

The Archbishop told Fides the reasons for the exodus: "The murder of 3 Christians in the same family, which occurred a few days ago (the father and two brothers of Mazen Ishaq, a Syrian Catholic priest of Mosul, were killed February 23) is terrible news because the faithful have been hunted down and killed in their home. The event has created havoc and terror, so the family fled. It is a dark time for us Christians in Iraq. The faithful do not see a rosy future. They should not have to endure threats and be forced to leave their homes every time there are elections. This is what happened two years ago and this is what is happening now. The state should guarantee security."

On the hopes that election day brings with it, Bishop Casmoussa said: "Hopefully after the elections, a new era will open for the country. I look forward to a new government in terms of thinking and foresight, a new government in a spirit of unity and non-partisanship. We want a government that ensures compliance with and enforcement of the Constitution within the law, ensuring the rule of law without discrimination."

The Prelate concludes: "Christians want full citizenship and demand that human, civil, social, economic, and political rights be protected and guaranteed for all Iraqi citizens." (PA) (Agenzia Fides 05/03/2010)