



## **ASIA/KYRGYZSTAN - A day of mourning; local Christians help collect aid for ethnic Uzbek refugees**

Bishkek (Agenzia Fides) – “At present the situation appears calmer. Today is a day of national mourning and hundreds of people gathered in the principal square in the capital Bishkek to commemorate those who died in the recent unrest. Naturally people all over the country, appalled by the tragic turn of events, fear more episodes of violence” Fides learned from the Apostolic Administrator Kyrgyzstan, Bishop Nikolaus Messmer, sj.. The Bishop added that for the largely Muslim population it is important to remember and to pray for the dead. Clashes between the Kyrgyz and Uzbeks over the past few days left 170 dead and 275 displaced persons, according to the partial figures released. The most affected cities are without electricity and gas, and water and food supplies are dwindling. “ Precise news on the situation in the most affected areas, the cities of Osh and Jalalabad is not easy to obtain - the Bishop continued -. Regarding the number of dead and wounded among the ethnic Uzbeks for example, there are still no precise figures. Fearing more repression the Uzbeks prefer to care for the wounded at home rather than take them into the city to hospital and they bury their dead secretly”. Many have asked for help and protection from Catholic structures. In Kyrgyzstan, among a population of some 5 million, Catholics number about 500. They are gathered in 3 parishes and there are 19 churches, served by 6 priests, 6 men religious and 4 women religious.

Following the sacking of shops in cities, the government asked the various Christian denominations present in the country to help supply humanitarian aid to the affected people: “Our Catholic community responded generously to the request for solidarity – Bishop Messmer told Fides- we were among the first to send food aid to affected communities. The affected cities are far away from the capital, about 600/800 km, and humanitarian aid has to be flown over a range of high mountains”. With regard to a solution for the crisis, the Bishop said “talks have started but it remains to be seen if and when results will be obtained. We will probably have to wait and watch developments in the coming months”. (MS) (Agenzia Fides 16/06/2010)