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Fondata nel 1927

AFRICA/SUDAN - "We have reached a time to move and prepare for change" Sudanese Bishops affirm

Khartoum (Agenzia Fides)- " This is an historic moment. This is a moment of change. Sudan will never be the same again," the Catholic Bishops of Sudan said in a message made public at the end of an Extraordinary Plenary Assembly held in Juba from 15 to 22 July.
In the message, a copy was sent to Fides by CISA in Nairobi, the Bishops affirm " After centuries of oppression and exploitation, after decades of war and violence which have marked and marred the lives of so many Sudanese in south and north with no respect for human life and dignity, and now, after 5 years of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), we have reached a time to move and prepare for change.".
The message mentions the Nairobi Peace Agreement in 2005, known as the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), which put an end to twenty years of civil war in southern Sudan. The agreement, which permitted the formation of an autonomous government in Southern Sudan and the participation of Southern Sudanese in the central government of Khartoum, also foresees a referendum on January 2011 on the independence of Southern Sudan (and a second referendum on the Abyei region claimed by north and south).
The Bishops acknowledge that the " The CPA has brought some progress. The conflict between south and north was moved from the military to the political arena … There have been attempts to address the Millennium Development Goals, particularly in the areas of health and education. ".
" However, - the Bishops underline - war continues in Darfur. Islam continues to be the source of legislation in the north, which adversely affects the rights of all, particularly non-Muslims. ". The message expresses concern for a deteriorating human rights climate, failure to repeal several oppressive laws including the National Security Act and to curtail the powers of national security organs, characterised by intimidation and detention without trial.

The Sudanese Bishops' Conference expresses concern also regarding the situation in the autonomous region of Southern Sudan, corruption, nepotism, lack of respect for human rights, harassment of humanitarian agencies and power struggles and violence.
" We urge our leaders in both north and south to ensure that the referenda for southern Sudan and Abyei should take place on time, in a free and fair manner, and that the outcomes are recognised and respected. " the message affirms.
" We call upon the international community to assist in the technical, logistical and operational stages of the referendum, to monitor and observe the process from start to finish, to guarantee implementation of the results and to mediate in case of any disagreement". The Bishops conclude, affirming that they and their local Church are committed to the work of peace-building and reconciliation in collaboration with all men and women of good will. (L.M.) (Agenzia Fides 26/7/2010)

> LINKS
See message from Sudanese Bishops (in English):
http://www.fides.org/eng/documents/A_MESSAGE_OF_HOPE_AND_A_CALL_TO_ACTION.rtf:

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