



AFRICA/SOUTH AFRICA - "The empty World Cup stadiums will now be filled with the fear of the people," missionary tells Fides

Cape Town (Agenzia Fides) – "South Africa is experiencing a difficult moment. The situation is no longer calm," Fides was told by Fr. Mario Tessarotto, Scalabrinian missionary in Cape Town who assists refugees from other African countries. For two weeks, healthcare workers and school staff have been on strike to demand a pay rise. They have also been joined by workers from other public sectors, creating a major inconvenience especially for the weakest in society. The Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference (SACBC), through a declaration signed by Cardinal Wilfrid Napier, Archbishop of Durban, has denounced the lack of care in hospitals (see Fides 21/8/2010).

"Even today in Cape Town the schools are closed, unlike other days, when most of the teachers had gone to give class. This is because the teachers who go to the school fear reprisal attacks - for example, having their car burned by extremists in the union struggle," said Fr. Mario.

"The claims of medical and teaching staff are sacrosanct, because their salaries are very low, so much so that many of them are unable to pay their rent. The union struggle, however, has taken a violent turn that is worrisome," said the missionary. "There is a climate of social conflict that does not promise a bright future. During the World Cup, I said that the empty stadiums would later be filled with the fear of the people, because I felt that this unrest was still latent."

Fr. Mario explains that "the economic disparities between the ruling elite, even the union elite, and the population have created a striking contrast. Officially, the unemployment rate in South Africa is 28%, but it is really at least 40%, because the official statistics include those who work odd or improvised jobs, making 5 euros per day at most.

"Lastly, the country continues to see the circulation of too many weapons. The violent robberies are a daily occurrence and crime is prevalent. It is a situation that must be addressed by all South Africans, looking towards the common good and not personal or group interests," concludes Fr. Mario. (L.M.) (Agenzia Fides 08/27/2010)