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AFRICA/SUDAN - Church's concern for fate of Sudanese from south living in north, in case of southern secession

Khartoum (Agenzia Fides) – A call to pray for peace in Sudan was launched by Bishop Cesare Mazzolari, Bishop of Rumbek, in southern Sudan, on the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary.
Bishop Mazzolari led the prayer at the Cathedral of the Holy Family. The prayer is part of the "101 Days of Prayer" (see Fides 22/9/2010) to promote the peaceful conduct of the referendum of January 9, 2011 on the independence of southern Sudan.
As Sudan approaches the date of the referendum vote, more and more politicians and figures in society are expressing their opinion on the issue, saying whether they are for or against the secession of the south from the rest of the country. However, there is also an increase in situations of tension. On October 7, the central government in Khartoum accused the Southern Sudanese Army (based on the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2005, southern Sudan has an autonomous regional government and its own armed forces, although respecting the integrity of the one state) of having occupied a region disputed between north and south Sudan. According to a military spokesman in Khartoum, "the referendum could be rendered impossible if these violations continue."
The President of Southern Sudan, Salva Kiir, told a UN Security Council delegation visiting the country, that he may independently organize the referendum in the region administered by him, if the central government should continue to hinder voting.
The tension between north and south Sudan has aroused the concern of Catholic Bishops. According to reports from the agency in Nairobi, CISA, Fr. Santino Maurino Morokomomo, Secretary General of the Bishops' Conference of Sudan, in an interview with Good News Radio in Rumbek, has expressed fears for the fate of southern Sudanese who live in the north. "The lives of southern Sudanese in the north is under threat," said Morokomomo, because most of them are inclined towards the separation of the south from the rest of the country. Fr. Morokomomo added that the southern Sudanese who want to return to their areas of origin cannot do so, as they have no financial resources.
The Secretary of the Bishops' Conference has appealed to the Government of Southern Sudan to help these people to return to the south. Fr. Morokomomo finally expressed his fear that in the case of separation between north and south, the Church in the north of Sudan could be subject to persecution in the form of confiscation of property and personal threats. (L.M.) (Agenzia Fides 08/10/2010)

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