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ASIA/INDIA - Cardinal Gracias asks President Obama to help protect human rights

Bombay (Agenzia Fides) – Christians in India are asking U.S. President Barack Obama to stand up for issues such as human rights, peace, justice, and dialogue, says Cardinal Oswald Gracias, Archbishop of Bombay and Chairman of the Bishops' Conference of India, in an interview with Fides. Obama, on the first leg of his Asian trip, will stop in India from November 6 to 8.

Cardinal Gracias told Fides: "It will be a visit to show friendship and cooperation between two countries, India and the United States, the largest democracies in the world...One of the themes to be discussed is the fight against terrorism: the President will stop, symbolically, to stay at the Taj Mahal Hotel in Mumbai, affected by terrorist violence in 2008. The message we want to launch to the world, as Indians and as Christians, is that terrorism is an evil and hatred is the result: we believe that love is the force that moves the universe and can create peace, justice, joy."

"Christians in India - continues the Archbishop of Bombay - expect President Obama to support human rights, pluralism, dialogue, and tolerance." The Cardinal says that on November 7, Obama will make a stop at Holy Name Catholic School in Bombay to celebrate Diwali, the Hindu festival of light: "This is also a symbolic act. We are honored by his presence. I should note that this institution, like many other Catholic schools in India, has only 5% Christian students, while 60% are Hindu and 35% are Muslim. Here, Obama will find children of different cultures, religions, and traditions that express the vast and plural identities in India. It will be an opportunity to send out a message of friendship and dialogue between Christians and Hindus, but also to reiterate the need to safeguard pluralism and protection of religious minorities in India," he continued.

"The visit to a Catholic school – the Cardinal told Fides – also represents a clear recognition, before the whole country, of the valuable work of education at the highest level and the excellent service to the nation carried out by Christian schools."

The Cardinal's final hope is that Obama's visit "will serve to remind the nation that the Christians, although a minority, are not strangers, as some Hindu extremist groups affirm, but are completely Indian citizens that share in the fate of the nation and are happily and actively engaged in the development, progress, and peace of the country." (PA) (Agenzia Fides 05/11/2010)

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