



AFRICA/SUDAN - "Vote calm, people participate en-masse," says the Bishop of Tombura-Yambio

Khartoum (Agenzia Fides) - "The people are voting en-masse and so far the voting procedures have taken place in calm," Bishop Edward Hiiboro Kussala of Tombura-Yambio told Fides, in southern Sudan, where yesterday, 9 January, the referendum began on the region's independence. "The fears of possible attacks by Ugandan rebels of the LRA (Lord's Resistance Army), thank God have not been verified, although we should be vigilant because the voting will not end until 15 January," said Bishop Kussala. For several years the LRA have been conducting raids on the area.

In this regard Bishop Kussala says that "according to what I have been told by an Acholi leader from northern Uganda, the LRA leadership seems to be divided between two options: attack during the referendum or wait for its conclusion and see if a new military operation will be taken against them by the armies of the Countries threatened by this group (Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda and South Sudan) with American support. In this case, the LRA will attack different parts of southern Sudan. It seems to have prevailed the second option." The Acholi are the main population of northern Uganda and the LRA leadership is composed of members from this ethnic group.

Bishop Kussala also reports that in his diocese, one notices the return of southern Sudanese who lived in the north, to the extent of "20-40 people a day." "These people," says the Bishop of Tombura-Yambio, "find themselves in serious trouble because they have only a few personal effects with them. They are hosted by relatives and acquaintances, but our territory will find it difficult to absorb this flow of people, also because various agricultural infrastructure have been destroyed by previous LRA raids."

According to Bishop Kussala about 30,000 southern Sudanese living in Khartoum intend to return to the south before the conclusion of the referendum. "We do not have the means and facilities, however, to welcome and support all these people," concludes the Bishop. (LM) (Agenzia Fides 10/01/2011)