



AFRICA/CÔTE D'IVOIRE - "We are pleased about the Holy Father's words. We hope that his voice is heard," says the Archbishop of Abidjan after Benedict XVI's appeal for peace in Côte d'Ivoire

Abidjan (Agenzia Fides) - "We are pleased about the Holy Father's words and we thank him for them. We hope that his voice is heard," says Archbishop Jean-Pierre Kutwa of Abidjan, in Côte d'Ivoire to Fides. In addition, Archbishop Kutwa repeats that the "humanitarian situation is out of control. There are thousands and thousands of displaced people thanks to the fighting" (see Fides 29/3/2011).

At today's Audience, Wednesday, 30 March, Pope Benedict XVI said: "For a long time now, my thoughts have often turned to the people of Côte d'Ivoire, traumatized by painful internal strife and serious social and political tensions. While I express my closeness to all those who have lost a loved one and suffer from violence, I appeal urgently for a process of constructive dialogue to be undertaken as soon as possible for the common good." The political confrontation between President-elect Alassane Ouattara (recognised by the international community) and the incumbent President Laurent Gbagbo has transformed into a military confrontation between the Republican Forces (ex- rebels who support Ouattara) and the security forces who have remained loyal to Gbagbo. "The dramatic opposition," underlined the Holy Father, "makes the restoration of respect and peaceful coexistence more urgent. No effort should be spared in this sense."

Pope Benedict XVI also announced the decision to send Cardinal Peter Turkson Kodwo, President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace to Côte d'Ivoire, to express his solidarity and that of the universal Church to victims of the conflict, "and to promote reconciliation and peace."

For several days now the Republican forces have gone on the offensive in several areas of Côte d'Ivoire (see Fides 29/03/2011), winning over some major cities like Duékoué (west), where according to Amnesty International, at least 10,000 people have sought refuge in the last few days in the local Catholic mission. The mission had already received more than 5,000 refugees. (L.M.) (Agenzia Fides 30/3/2011)