



## **AFRICA / EGYPT - The Bishop of Luxor to Fides: "The people of Upper Egypt feels neglected by the central government"**

Luxor (Agenzia Fides) - "We live on the edge of a volcano, we do not know what will happen tomorrow", says Bishop Joannes Zakaria, Bishop of the Catholic Copts of Luxor, Egypt, to Fides and whose diocese is part of Qana, where there have been disorders for the appointment of a Coptic as the new governor of the region. "There is tension, so I advised the faithful during the Mass of Palm Sunday, to stay calm, to never lose patience and not to accept provocation", said Bishop Zakaria.

The Bishop of Luxor explains the deep reasons of the recent tensions: "The Egyptian society has been overwhelmed by the democratic revolution, without being prepared for this climate of freedom. New spaces for extremists have been created, thanks to the return to Egypt of several of them, even with a criminal past. There are many forces that seek to gain space in the Egyptian society, some of which act with criminal and illegal methods."

As far as the question of the Governor is concerned, Bishop Zakaria says: "It is true that the protest is politically motivated, because the outgoing governor (also Coptic) has done little to improve conditions in Upper Egypt. This region, since the beginning of its history, has always been neglected by the central government. Cairo and Lower Egypt get most of the resources. The local population feels neglected by the government. The only form of progress is the rail link with Cairo. A stroke of luck, because if a person requires special medical treatment, they must go to the capital. The same thing for those who want to do high school studies".

"In this context - continues Bishop Zakaria -, where anger and frustration of the population increases, the appointment of another Coptic governor is perceived only as a propaganda move for external consumption use, to show the world that Egypt is open to minorities. But this nomination does not meet the real needs of the population. The Egyptian problems are ignorance and poverty. The people struggle to survive and revelations about corruption of the former regime have increased the feeling of anger of all, Muslims and Christians". Finally, the Bishop makes an appeal: "I ask the prayers of all, for Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen and other Middle Eastern countries, so that a policy of peace is found. I have a feeling that too many states at the moment are only promoting their own interests, ignoring the real needs of the people of the area", concluded Bishop Zakaria.

(L.M.) (Agenzia Fides 20/04/2011)