



ASIA/AFGHANISTAN-Education and professional training: the Jesuits' commitment to give a future to the country

Herat (Agenzia Fides) - In a country torn by war and terrorism, the young Afghans, who are 68% of the population, "want peace and security and dream about education", like all the other young in the world. "The Church must help young people to realize this dream, and this is the mission of the Jesuits and of the Jesuit Refugee Service Volunteers (JRS)": says the Indian Jesuit Fr. Stan Fernandes SJ, Director of the JRS in Afghanistan in a note sent to Fides. The Director notes that "children and young people are tired of war and very few of them have the opportunity to go to school". Out of 33 million Afghans, "only 10 thousand are rebels, but monopolise the interest and resources of the international community. Our mission is to give voice and hope to 99.9% of the Afghan population, who struggle to get ahead and hope with all their heart to build for a better tomorrow".

"Together with the Afghan population – he continues - we hope and pray for peace and we continue our journey among these people, reaching out to the most marginalised. Young people who have lived through war and exile, will lead the country tomorrow. This generation needs to be empowered in order to focus their energies, enthusiasm and potential, to promote peace and development in the country".

The JRS have been working in Afghanistan since 2005, when a team of Indian Jesuits started programs in the field of education: today in the "Technical High School" in Herat, there are 600 students taking courses in electricity, electronics, construction, trade. Since 2006, the religious also teach English, computer science, biology and physics to more than 3,000 university students in Herat, Bamiyan and Kabul.

In another initiative, the Jesuits assisting the refugees who have returned to Afghanistan in the city of Sohadat, 35 km from Herat, provide them with food assistance, health services and education, in a primary school attended by over 200 children, and through a clinic that takes care of 250 patients a week. Training and development programs dedicated specifically to women are also active (PA) (Agenzia Fides 07/13/2011)