



## **ASIA/JAPAN - Caritas, six months after the earthquake: "Winter is round the corner for 100 thousand displaced persons, more efficient aid is required"**

Tokyo (Agenzia Fides) - "Winter is round the corner and it will be a very cold season. So it is essential that the new government manages the aid and accommodation of displaced persons with greater speed and efficiency": with these words, reported to Fides, Fr. Daisuke Narui, executive Director of Caritas Japan, presents Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda's new government the expectations and hopes that touch the difficult phase of recovery for over 100 thousand displaced persons, six months after the earthquake and tsunami that devastated Japan on 11 March.

According to figures by the Japanese police, the earthquake provoked 15,774 victims in addition to 4,227 people which are still missing. Over 410 thousand are homeless, evacuated from areas affected by the earthquake and tsunami, while other 84 thousand people had to leave their homes because situated in the area of the nuclear power plant in Fukushima, damaged by the disaster. Six months after the earthquake, about 90 thousand people are still hospitalized in tents or temporary shelters, and 10 thousand are camped in schools or public buildings. Other 15 thousand cannot return to their homes because they are situated in the ring of land within 20 km from the nuclear power plant, which has been declared a "radioactive area".

"The first challenge for relief workers - explains the Director of Caritas - is preparing to face a very cold winter. We hope that the government carries out financing plans and reintegration of refugees well, as time is running out". The Japanese government has given the green light to the creation of a fund (about 90 billion euros) in compensation for all, moral and material damages, caused to the population by the nuclear accident.

"On our behalf - continues Fr. Narui - the auxiliary work of Caritas is going very well. We have sent over 15,000 volunteers to help the displaced, especially in the area of Sendai, the most affected. Many of them in tents have been able to move to temporary accommodation. We have supported at least 10 thousand people, in many ways - material but also moral support. We will continue to do our best".

An emergency in the emergency is that of families living near the nuclear power plant in Fukushima. Fr. Darui notes: "Here one lives in fear of the future. On the one hand there are the refugees who were residents in the territory within 20km around the plant. For them, new accommodation must be found. But for fear of radiation, including many families with mothers and children, have abandoned their homes in areas outside the ring. Caritas has also sent some volunteers in the area of Fukushima: they visit the families and listen to their needs, but it is the government that must respond to their needs". Schools in Fukushima Prefecture (about 20km outside the ring) have reopened, but according to non-governmental organization studies, the danger of radiation is still high, especially for children, so many families have decided to move. "Christians in Japan - concludes Father Darui - are showing, in this emergency, a great deal of solidarity in practical help, in money donations, volunteers but also with a constant prayer". (PA) (Agenzia Fides 09/09/2011)