



AFRICA/TUNISIA - "The Arab spring" at the center of meeting of the Bishops of North Africa

Tunis (Agenzia Fides) - The social and political situation in North Africa was the focus of the meeting of the Conference of Bishops of North Africa Region (CERNA), which was held in Tunis from November 13 to 16. It was attended by the Bishops, Apostolic Vicars and the Apostolic Administrator of the region with their general Vicars.

According to information sent to Fides, the meeting was presided by Archbishop Vincent Landel, Archbishop of Rabat and President of CERNA. His Exc. Mgr. Thomas Yeh, Apostolic Nuncio in Algiers and Tunis; His Exc. Mgr. Martin Happe, Bishop of Nouakchott (Mauritania) and His Exc. Mgr. Domenico Mogavero, Bishop of Mazara del Vallo in Sicily (Italy), European region close to Maghreb who participated in the work, "emphasizing the communion with the Holy See and the opening of sister Churches".

A lengthy exchange on the situation of their Countries and their respective ecclesial communities characterized the first two days of work. The two Apostolic Vicars of Libya (Tripoli and Benghazi) long witnessed the events of the Libyan revolution, their consequences for the Christian community, but especially on the joy of the population that feels free now. The two Prelates also stressed the urgency of national reconciliation. "In Tunisia, the elections showed the thirst for responsible citizenship of the region's inhabitants", the statement said.

The Bishops of CERNA indicated three emerging key challenges, which in their view, the Countries of the region have to face: a religious, a political and a social-economic challenge. "The members of the Church, in general, are not directly involved in these steps, but they feel 'astonished witnesses' – these are the words used by the Archbishop of Tunis in the Pastoral Letter – referred to what is germinating throughout Maghreb, the promotion of values in which they fully recognize themselves in. They share the joys and hopes of these people".

The CERNA members share the suffering of the Bishops of Algeria for the delays and sometimes the refusal of granting visas to priests and men and women religious and, regardless of their nationality. They believe that this is a serious interference in the life of their local Churches. "This makes them sad, especially since these people are called to be part of the ecclesial communities which - without a spirit of proselytism – carry out real services to the Country and maintain very cordial relations with everyone".

The Bishops stressed the importance of the work of the local Caritas, in collaboration with other associations and Muslim leaders in different areas of human development: the promotion of women, support to migrants, prisoners and people with disabilities, response to social emergencies etc. ... The next CERNA meeting will be held in Mazara del Vallo (Italy) from 17 to 22 November 2012. (L.M.) (Agenzia Fides 17/11/2011)