



AMERICA/CUBA - Government's full availability for the Pope's visit

Havana (Agenzia Fides) - The president of Cuba, Raul Castro, yesterday received a delegation from the Holy See in preparation for the upcoming trip of Pope Benedict XVI to the island, announced by the Pontiff himself during the Mass celebrated on December 12 in St. Peter's Basilica for the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe and the Bicentenary of the independence of many Latin American Countries. From the information Fides gathered it is known that the meeting took place in the palace of the Council of State in Revolution Square. According to an official statement, read during the national news, Castro showed his full availability for the papal visit, scheduled for late March 2012. The news is presented again today by the official Cuban and Latin American media, stressing the "excellent relationship" between Cuba and the Vatican.

The Granma newspaper today has a front-page photo of Raul Castro and Alberto Gasbarri, responsible for the organization of papal trips around the world. There has never been such a media coverage for such an event, even during the preparation for Pope John Paul II's visit to Cuba in 1998.

The meeting took place while the image of the Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre, the patroness of Cuba, is making an unprecedented pilgrimage in the neighborhoods, places of religious institutions and in the most significant places in Havana, on the occasion of the National Pilgrimage which celebrates 400 years of the discovery the image of Mary. The pilgrimage will conclude with an outdoor Mass on December 30, on the Avenida del Puerto, while the Bishops have called the Marian Jubilee Year, from January 7, 2012 to January 5, 2013 (see Fides 09/12/2011). (CE) (Agenzia Fides 19/12/2011)