



## **AFRICA/MALAWI - A Christmas in poverty, the only hope for the population is the lottery**

Lilongwe (Agenzia Fides) - "The corn just sprouted up waited the dew of the night in vain to survive a few more days. Then everything dried up. Some more robust seedlings of cotton survive here and there, the rest has been virtually erased. We must start all over again. Many families do not even have the seeds for when the rains come. Three months after the beginning of the rainy season there is nothing in the fields. How can one spend Christmas in this poverty?" says to Fides Fr. Piergiorgio Gamba, a Monfort missionary who has been living in Malawi for over 30 years.

What has to be added to this problem is the political mismanagement of the national economy. "Never has the Country fallen so low. 'Malawi is sinking', says the Committee for Justice and Peace of the Catholic Church ". With the exchange rate of the local currency kept artificially high for political reasons, there is no electricity and there is fuel shortages, "these deficiencies themselves put at risk a small Country with 80% devoted to ' agriculture and whose people live in villages", says the missionary. In the city there are long queues of cars literally abandoned in the vicinity of petrol pumps.

"The prices now are uncontrollable and no one offers an estimate that is valid for a few days. The materials that were purchased abroad and then transformed on the spot cannot be purchased except for the black market. Cement cannot be found, iron is increasingly scarce ... "

The regime also uses an iron fist to keep the situation under control and prevent the explosion of social protest. The police claim to have detained or arrested more than 4000 people under the pretext of wanting to ensure a peaceful Christmas to the people.

"A further sign of disarray in the country is the opening of the Lot, which promises a weekly ten million Kwacha to a winner who can 'dream of a new life'. Starting this week there is also 'Scratchcard' sponsored by a Chinese businessman, "says Fr Gamba.

"The next elections are in 2014. Too far away even if one cannot count on elections seeing how the results are cheated. How can one start the political change? Must the Church take responsibility for this task?" Asks the missionary in conclusion. (L.M.) (Agenzia Fides 28/12/2011)