



## **AFRICA/NIGERIA - "We need a political solution to stop Boko Haram" says to Fides the Archbishop of Abuja**

Abuja (Agenzia Fides) - "The problem of Boko Haram cannot be solved only at a security level, but a clear strategy is needed to involve all the political environments in the north of the Country, to cope with the issue," says to Fides Archbishop John Olorunfemi Onaiyekan, Archbishop of Abuja, federal capital of Nigeria.

"When I refer to these environments, I do not say that they are responsible for the violence of the Boko Haram, but of course there are attitudes of letting go or of not supporting the government. In other words proactive actions to eliminate this danger are not taken", said Mgr. Onaiyekan, who stresses: " Sooner or later someone will have to talk to the Boko Haram and I think those who can talk to them are those who share their own expectations, but not their methods. I realize that it is difficult to find common ground because neither the government nor the majority of Nigerians want an Islamic State. But we need to involve all political parties in a national dialogue to get out of this crisis in Nigeria", said the Archbishop.

According to Mgr. Onaiyekan the political solution is a necessary way, because "it is impossible to guarantee everyone's safety in such a vast country. It is very easy to transfer weapons from one part of Nigeria to another. The same police stations, which were the object of recent attacks carried out by Boko Haram, are often isolated and not easily defensible. We must therefore find another way to stop the Boko Haram and I think this is possible".

With regards to the arrest in Kano (northern cities where the last attack of the sect caused 185 deaths) of about 200 Boko Haram activists, most of whom are Chadian immigrants, Mgr. Onaiyekan said "I do not think we can say that these people are mercenaries from Chad, because the border between Chad, Niger and northern Nigeria are very permeable, and there are continuous movements of population between one country and another, to the point that no one knows who is from Nigeria, Niger, and those who are Chadians. The only thing that these arrests show is that the phenomenon of Boko Haram goes beyond the borders of Nigeria and therefore there is the need to involve the governments of neighboring Countries. Closing the borders is useless. The border between Niger and Nigeria is huge and it is a flat desert, easy to cross, and impossible to control".

We ask the Archbishop of Abuja if it is true that there is a mass exodus of Christians from the north of Nigeria.

"The population moves out of fear – he answers -. Those who can escape do so, especially those who are originally from other parts of the Country: they go back home waiting to see how the situation develops. The vast majority of Christians has remained. One must take into consideration that the original population of the south that have been living in the north for more than 2-3 generations is very consistent".

"Whoever says that Nigeria will be divided between a Muslim north and a Christian south does not know the reality of the Country" stresses Mgr. Onaiyekan. "I am just wondering: where is the border between North and South Nigeria? No one knows. We have always said that talking about the north and south is not the same as talking about division between Islam and Christianity. There is a large number of Muslims in the south, in particular in the state of Yoruba, and a number much higher than what is being said, of Christians of the north, many of whom are indigenous. These latter, where should they go in case of division of the Country? " asks the Archbishop. (L.M.) (Agenzia Fides 27/01/2012)