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AFRICA/ZAMBIA - "Good relations with the government, but more attention to the weakest," write the Bishops

Lusaka (Agenzia Fides) - The Bishops of Zambia are opposed to forced repatriation of Rwandese refugees who live in the Country and condemn cases of abuse against children. This is shown by a articulated pastoral Letter, which Fides received, in which the Zambia Episcopal Conference takes stock of the situation in the Country and the relations between Church and State.
The Bishops note that "so far, our relations with the new government are friendly. We would like to reiterate what we have always said to the previous governments. Our prophetic voice on national issues is motivated by our divine obligation and a desire to see the government working for the good of the Country and be successful".
The Bishops express appreciation for what has been done by the government to fight corruption, but they ask, however, a greater effort, even to avoid the phenomenon of nepotism in the appointment of senior civil servants.
On the issue of Rwandans refugees, the Bishops say: "Since independence, Zambia has always been an oasis of peace in the midst of a region in conflict. As a result, Zambia has become a haven for refugees. We are therefore strongly disturbed by the complaints of the refugees, especially those from Rwanda, that the Ministry of Interior, in agreement with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and eventually by the Rwandese government, are trying to forcibly repatriate Rwandan refugees".
Among the social problems of the Country, the Bishops point out the increase of violence against women and child abuse, defined as "indecent and inhumane acts." In particular what is serious is the spread of AIDS and HIV, which "devastates families and constitutes a major threat to our survival, both as a nation and as a continent".
On the economic front, the Bishops call for better distribution of wealth from the exploitation of mineral resources of the Country, where social protests are not uncommon. "We are aware that the frequent strikes and industrial unrest in the country are signs of dissatisfaction and injustice in work relations", said the Episcopal Conference. "We must stop the trend, which started in the early '90s with the liberalization of trade unions, which led to unintended consequences such as undermining workers' organizations". (L.M.) (Agenzia Fides 30/01/2012)

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