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ASIA/SYRIA - The Maronite Archbishop: "Christians powerless, while the conflict is headed into the unknown"

Damascus (Agenzia Fides) - "The suffering which we live is great. We are assisting the tragedy helplessly. Fortunately, the Holy Father Benedict XVI fills the void demanding peace, justice, dialogue and reconciliation" Mgr. Samir Nassar, Maronite Archbishop of Damascus says to Fides, a year into the insurgency and violence in Syria.

In a message sent to Fides, the Archbishop said that "what started as a small demonstration in the southern part of Syria, on March 15, 2011, has now turned into a crisis engulfing every city in the country. Faced with a crisis that has grown from local to regional proportions in little under a year, Syria has become an international conflict zone where political, military and economic stakes are shaping the future of country ".

Archbishop Nassar notes that "the conflict is headed into the unknown: on one side, a strong, centralized power that refuses to let go; on the other, a determined popular uprising that will not alleviate or surrender, despite the intensity of the violence. This conflict, which is paralyzing the country, is defined by: economic sanctions, inflation, devaluation of the local currency (-60%), rising unemployment, destruction, displaced populations and victims by the thousands". The people "are subjected to enormous pressure and intense suffering that grow as time goes by. Hatred, divisions and misery continue to swell in the absence of acts of compassion and humanitarian relief. Syria is seemingly headed towards a deadly impasse ", he notes with concern.

With regards to the condition of Christians, the Archbishop said: "The current deadlock is fueling the anguish of the faithful who, at the end of each Mass, bid their final farewells, so uncertain is their future. The embassy closings in Damascus have made it impossible to obtain visas, thus significantly curtailing the possibility of leaving the country".

"In this time of great torment and division - says Archbishop Nassar - families becomes the sole refuge for victims of the crisis. The family acts as a shield that ensures the survival of society and Church. This is why, in the face of such tragedy, the Church has chosen to focus its attention and prayer on families, by providing them with all available help and support".

But in the meanwhile "the crisis is far from coming to a close. Rather, the storm is getting stronger and the end of the tunnel remains out of sight". The important question is: "Where is Syria headed?". With this concern, concludes the Archbishop, Christians begin Lent "in silence, with empty hands, heavy hearts and eyes turned upon the Christ Reborn, who guides our steps along the path of forgiveness and peace" (PA) (Agenzia Fides 15/3/2012)

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