



ASIA/TURKEY - The Churches: may the new Constitution be "like a mother who embraces all her children"

Istanbul (Agenzia Fides) – May the Constitution be "like a mother who embraces all her children": this is the desire of the Christian communities in Turkey, invited by the Parliamentary Commission in charge of drafting the new Constitution Charter for Turkey to express themselves. As sources of Fides report, the will of a contribution of religious minorities is already "a test of how the new Constitution will support freedom. As Christian citizens, we demand the same rights as Turkish Muslim citizens," said Yusuf Sag, Patriarchal Exarch, leader of the Syrian Catholic Church in the country, the day after the meeting.

The Commission received the representatives of some minority groups yesterday, including Catholics, and various segments of civil society to listen to their suggestions. The meeting was attended, among others, by His Exc. Mgr. Ruggero Franceschini, President of the Episcopal Conference of Turkey, Monsignor Georges Khazzoum for Armenian Catholics, Mgr. Yusuf Sag, for Syrian Catholics.

As reported to Fides, Mgr. Yusuf Sag remarked: "We hope that the new Constitution will highlight freedom. We want a constitution that accepts and embraces all just like a mother does with her children. We have no expectations other than those of the Muslim Turks: as Syrians who have been living on this earth for 4500 years, we expect to have the same rights as Muslim Turk citizens."

According to the representatives present yesterday, the biggest problem is the lack of legal recognition for the Catholic Church. Mgr. Franceschini reported "a sincere and friendly meeting," telling of an "open debate, where everyone could express their opinions." The crucial question, he explained, "is to receive official legal recognition: Some Catholic churches must carry out their services giving rise to associations and NGOs. We Catholics cannot even repair our churches or adequately manage our properties." The historic churches - he remarked, "are a heritage of all humanity, not only of the people belonging to one community." A note of the Episcopal Conference, sent to Fides, informs that "in the next meetings issues of ownership of churches, schools, hospitals, and other assets of which the Latin Catholic Church currently owns property titles will be examined," concluding: "With patience, elapsed talks between the two parties, one can see the possibility of reaching good agreements. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 17/4/2012)