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ASIA/MIDDLE EAST - Religious minorities scapegoated in the Middle East, if Arab revolutions "soured"

London (Agenzia Fides) - If the revolutions initiated by the Arab Spring "soured", there are strong risks for ethnic and religious minorities in the Middle East: is what emerges from a new Report "People Under Threat", just published by the NGO" Minority Rights Group" (MRG) and sent to Fides Agency, focused on the situation of minorities in the Middle East. "If 2011 will be remembered as the year of the Arab Spring, then 2012 could become the year the revolutions soured" says Mark Lattimer, MRG's Executive Director in a note sent to Fides. "The huge changes taking place across the Middle East and North Africa, while increasing hopes for democratization, represent for both religious and ethnic minorities perhaps the most dangerous episode since the violent break-up of the Soviet Union and the former Yugoslavia," he warns.
The Report notes that Syria, Libya, Egypt, Yemen, South Sudan are among the states where minority communities are more at threat of mass killing. As soon as political space and a glimpse of freedom opens up, ethnic and sectarian grievances are exacerbated, and in these dynamics, "minorities are often scapegoated," says MRG.
In Syria, where the government is dominated by Alawites, Shi’a and Alawite communities are at risk if the conflict intensifies, while Christians are deeply concerned about the possibility of attacks from Sunni militants.
In Libya, former rebels continue to hold more than 6,000 people arrested during or after armed conflict, detained without charge or trial, half sub-Saharan migrants or black Libyans, many of whom have been tortured to death.
In Egypt, the Report notes, highlights that a growing number of Coptic Christians leave the country following attacks on churches and intimidation. The political success of the Muslim Brotherhood and of Salafist parties is viewed with concern by other religious minorities such as Baha'i and Shi'a.
In Yemen, clashes between Sunni tribes and al-Houthis are added to the protests of thousands of protesters from the Akhdam community, who complain about marginalization and racism.
Serious danger, moreover, can be seen in South Sudan, where a large-scale inter-community violence has developed in Jonglei, affecting about 120,000 people, while in recent months, thousands of refugees from Sudan have fled to South Sudan, escaping Sudanese government shelling of communities in the Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile area.
"The ethnic and religious differences between Muslims and non-Muslims, between Arabs and non-Arabs, are all expressions of an internal diversity, often under-estimated in the Middle East that could become fault-lines for mass killing," warns Mark Lattimer. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 25/5/2012)

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