



AFRICA/KENYA - "Churches are hit because they are easy targets, but the motivation is political," says to Fides the Bishop of Garissa

Nairobi (Agenzia Fides) - "I do not think it is a religious problem but a reaction to embarrass the government in Nairobi for what the Kenyan army is doing in Somalia against the Shabaab" says to Fides Agency His Exc. Mgr. Paul Darmanin, Bishop of Garissa, in Kenya, where yesterday, Sunday 1 July, armed men, probably Islamic fundamentalist Somali Shabaab attacked two churches, including the Catholic Cathedral.

Mgr. Darmanin describes the attacks to Fides: "On July 1, around 10:30 am, local time, two hand grenades were thrown at the church of Our Lady of Consolation, only one exploded just in front of the building, not inside, causing some slight injuries. At the African Inland Church the attack was terrible. The assailants, after killing two soldiers who stood guard at the place of worship, threw some hand grenades into the building where the faithful gathered for church service. The aim was to make them escape outside, where they were hit with the AK-47 taken from the soldiers. It was a well organized attack in which at least 16 people died and several were seriously wounded.

"The Bishop believes that the motivation is purely political: "The Shabaab had threatened reprisals for operations carried out since October 2011 by the Kenyan army in Somalia. Now that the army of Nairobi has increased the pressure on Kismayo, their last stronghold in southern Somalia, the Shabaab have increased the threat to strike in Kenyan territory."

"Garissa is not far from the border with Somalia," continues Mgr. Darmanin. "The border is easily crossed even though the government is doing its best to control it.

"We ask the Bishop of Garissa if the reason for these attacks is political why are churches attacked. "The churches are attacked because they are "soft targets ". In addition, the local population is almost entirely Muslim, Christians are Kenyans from other parts of the country, regarded as foreigners by at least a portion of the native population " says Mgr. Darmanin, who concludes by asking everyone to pray for peace in the Country . (L.M.) (Agenzia Fides 02/07/2012)