



ASIA/SYRIA - "The dangers are anarchy, weapons, interference; dialogue and reconciliation are necessary": Patriarch Gregory III Laham's appeal

Damascus (Agenzia Fides) - As the Syrian crisis deepens, in front of what is now called a "civil war"; while "the language of violence prevails and the voice of moderation weakens" "efforts for dialogue and reconciliation are necessary": So says S.B. Greek Melkite Patriarch Gregory III Laham, in a statement sent exclusively to Fides Agency. The Patriarch, trusting in the spirit of the Syrian people, says: "The Syrians, thanks to their long history, can solve this dangerous crisis helping each other, through love and forgiveness. We launch an urgent appeal for dialogue, reconciliation, peace: this is one of the rarest languages that many people do not want to hear. We Christians, to whom the gospel of peace has been entrusted, feel called to promote it."

Analyzing the Syrian crisis, the Patriarch notes: "The greatest threat to Syria today is anarchy, insecurity and the influx of weapons from all sides. Violence begets violence, that reaches all citizens, without distinction of race, religion or political color." In this context, "Christians live the same dangers, but they are the weakest link. Helpless, they are the most vulnerable to exploitation, extortion, kidnapping, abuse. Despite this, there is no conflict between Christians and Muslims. There is no persecution, and Christians are not targeted as such, but are among the victims of chaos and lack of security."

Among the negative elements, according to the Patriarch, "there is the interference of foreign elements, Arab and Western, that bring arms, money and information in one way. This interference is detrimental to the so called opposition, and damaging to national unity, as it weakens the voice of moderation".

As far as the attitude of the Churches is concerned, Patriarch Gregory III Laham says: "The Catholic Churches of all denominations, in Syria have raised their voices, demanding reforms, freedom, democracy, fight corruption, support for development, freedom of speech. Today we ask to stop the cycle of killings and destruction, especially against civilians in need, of all faiths, who in reality are the real victims. The Church has always shunned sectarianism, without taking sides, and pointing to the ethical and evangelical values." For this reason, he notes, a "campaign against the pastors of the Churches in Syria" is to be rejected, accused of collusion with the regime, reaffirming "the credibility, transparency, loyalty and objectivity of the Pastors who are in constant contact with priests, monks, nuns and lay people." They, the note adds, "promote the call for dialogue and reconciliation, the rejection of violence. They work to protect the safety of civilians in the ongoing conflict, so as not to expose them to danger, to avoid becoming targets of attacks of one faction or another."

The Patriarch expressed, finally, "hope in civil society initiatives to strengthen the friendly ties between the Syrians that the conflict has destroyed. We pray for the success of the movement Mussalaha, where delegates are active in all the Churches, to bring unity and love in the hearts of all. This is what lays the foundation for effective solutions to the tragic conflict."

In this work, he concludes, "we need the support of the Pope and we hope that the forthcoming visit of the Pope in Lebanon will be of special help for Syria, so that the conflict may cease and the country may flourish. For this we ask the help of all our Christian brothers in the Middle East and around the world." (PA) (Agenzia Fides 17/7/2012)