



## **ASIA/LEBANON - From the Pope a message of peace for Syria and religious freedom in the Middle East**

Beirut (Agenzia Fides) - "The visit of Pope Benedict XVI in Lebanon represents a great hope for Lebanon, a message of peace for Syria and is an invitation to religious freedom throughout the Middle East": is what Fr. Paul Karam, National Director of the Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS) in Lebanon said in an interview with Fides. Referring to the great expectations in the Lebanese population, the Director believes that "the trip will bring attention to the issue of religious freedom, while we clearly see the rise of Islamic fundamentalism." "The Pope - says Fr. Paul - as Pope John Paul II did over ten years ago, carries a prophetic message of rejection of war and violence, of proposed basic values such as religious freedom and human rights."

The Director of the PMS notes: "The visit of the Pope anticipates the Year of Faith, which begins in October. It is a sign of providence to revive the Christian commitment in the Middle East." The area has been rocked by the Syrian conflict: "For Syria, the Pope will bring the message that Christ taught us: peace, dialogue, tolerance, acceptance of others. The Christian faithful of Syria - he says - are worried because they are exposed and vulnerable to violence. They wait with great anxiety and hope the arrival of the Pope. The appeal for peace in Syria should be stronger also for the international community, because it promotes dialogue between the warring parties. "Violence has never solved the problems," he says. "The only way is to meet for negotiations, with mutual respect for the welfare of all citizens. We need dialogue, according to credibility, transparency and truth. " "I hope that the visit of the Pope - he concludes - may renew between the Christians of Syria the responsibility of an authentic Christian witness, towards dialogue and solidarity, always in the light of truth which is Christ." (PA) (Agenzia Fides 27/7/2012)