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ASIA/SYRIA - "Faithful, do not leave Syria!": Patriarchs' Message, rallied around the Pope

Damascus (Agenzia Fides) - "With all my heart we ask the Christians of Syria not to leave our beloved country, despite the violence, the suffering, the displacement": This is what the Patriarchs of the Christian Churches in Syria ask and since this morning are in Lebanon to "rally around Benedict XVI, a pilgrim of peace in the Middle East." In a message released by Fides Agency, Christian leaders, welcome Benedict XVI, underline the topic which is dearest to local Churches: the presence of Christian communities in the Middle East. The four leaders based in Damascus shared the message: the greek-catholic Patriarch Gregory III Laham; the greek-orthodox Patriarch Ignatius IV Hazim; the Syrian Catholic Patriarch Ignatius III Younan; the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch Zakka I Iwas.
In particular, today in Syria there is a danger of an exodus of the faithful, many of whom are already heavily affected by poverty, were forced to leave their homes for the armed clashes, and live as internally displaced or in neighboring countries. In these tragic hours, the Patriarchs ask the faithful: "Be patient, do not run away," inviting them to "bear the pain", for Christ's sake.
Christian leaders in Syria deplore the attitude of some Western Chancellors that, explicitly or implicitly, are offering the faithful Syrians the opportunity to emigrate, noting that this "is a temptation," but is not the solution for Christians in Syria. The risk, they note, is a "Lebanonization of the Syrian conflict" (more than 50% of Christians fled Lebanon during the war) or the Iraqi scenario (in recent years the local Christian communities, under the pressure of terrorism, have considerably decreased).
The Patriarchs strongly support the Holy Father's recent appeal to dialogue and reconciliation in Syria, defined by the Pope "priority for all parties involved" and hope that Benedict XVI's visit may leave "a deep trace of peace."
As reported to Fides, a symbol of solidarity and love for the Pope is, in particular, the presence of the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch Zakka I Iwas, despite his illness and the dialysis treatment he needs, he wanted to be present next to Benedict XVI. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 14/09/2012)

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