



## **ASIA/LEBANON - Muhammad Sammak: "Everyone in Lebanon wanted the Pope to stay longer"**

Beirut (Agenzia Fides) - " Benedict XVI's visit to Lebanon showed the world that the Lebanese people, Christians and Muslims, are all on the same side, while the political parties and factions divide and create conflict. The hope is that the politicians in Lebanon learn something from the unity that was seen during the days of the papal visit." Is what Muhammad Sammak, political adviser to the Grand Mufti of Lebanon and Secretary General of the Lebanese Committee for Islamic-Christian dialogue explains to Fides. The days of the Pope in Lebanon were all a parenthesis of relief in the phase at risk of new lacerations experienced by the Country of the cedars. Sammak talks about this perception shared through an anecdote: "The television networks for a few days focused on the papal visit, and politicians with their oppositions disappeared from the screens. Everyone was happy about it, and wished for this reason that the papal visit to Lebanon lasted longer."

Sammak confides to Fides to be the author of the message that the Grand Mufti Mohammed Rashid Kabbani delivered to the Holy Father Benedict XVI during his meeting with the representatives of the Islamic communities: "I expressed in the text the concept that any harm done to a Christian is a wrong done to all Muslims, and every attack on a church is an attack against all mosques. A message that can be found in the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad. " The Grand Mufti's advisor defines as "phenomenal" the spirit in which all the Muslim components took part in the various stages of the papal visit: "The relations between Sunnis and Shiites in Lebanon are not good now, but they all participated together in the official meetings, the Mass, the moments of welcome and goodbye." Sammak enhances the approach to the relationship between Christians and Muslims expressed by Benedict XVI in his speech: "The Pope presented religious freedom as the mother of all rights. And it strikes me when he says that the antidote to extremism is not tolerance. We do not want Muslim-Christian relations based only on tolerance. They must be based on the rights of citizenship shared by all citizens, and then on mutual trust and mutual love. Tolerance alone is not enough. "

With references to the Syrian conflict, Sammak appreciates the intentions of the Pope not to enter the field of political controversy: "The Pope did not want to refer directly to political or geo-political issues. But he repeated to all the principles of human dignity and the protection of the rights of peoples to decide their own future. Any attempt to misuse his words is doomed to fail. Benedict XVI is the head of the Church, not a political leader. This is why he does not directly enter the political agenda. And so his words can be appreciated by all. "

Muhammad Sammak attended as a special guest at the 2010 Synod of Bishops on the Middle East. He confides to Fides with satisfaction that his speech made in the Synod Hall circulated in all Arab Countries, winning praises everywhere. On that occasion he said that the danger of a decline in the presence of Christians in the Middle East "is a concern both Christian and Islamic, not only for the Muslims of the East, but for all Muslims in the world." (GV) (Agenzia Fides 17/09/2012).