



ASIA/LEBANON - Christian and Muslim religious leaders reflect together on the Pope's visit

Bkerké (Agenzia Fides) - Benedict XVI's visit to Lebanon is increasingly shaping up as the potential beginning of a new season in the complex situation of the Lebanese nation. This is confirmed by the summit of the Heads of the local religious communities and their representatives held yesterday at the headquarters of the Maronite Patriarchate in Bkerke. The meeting, convened at the request of the Grand Mufti (Sunni) Mohammad Rashid Qabbani to discuss the attacks against Islam, then was extended to face a more complex agenda, focusing on the positive effects of the Pope's long journey in the Country of cedars.

All the religious leaders gathered in Bkerké expressed common satisfaction for a visit - we read in the final statement of the summit, sent to Fides Agency - "that legitimates Lebanon as a safe Country and open to different cultures and religions." The Christian and Muslim leaders agreed to work together to spread the text of the Pope's speech to the Lebanese and to send it also to the religious leaders of the neighboring Countries. The Pope's words are indicated in the statement of the summit as a point of national restart: despite the fragility of the internal stability and fears of a possible influence from the Syrian conflict, Benedict XVI reminded everyone that "Lebanon is first and foremost a space for "interaction and dialogue " and not " a scene of discord. " A sign that the Successor of Peter "continues to consider Lebanon as a bearer of an historical message and civilization for the whole world, especially for what concerns dialogue between civilizations and religions."

With regard to offenses against Islam, religious Lebanese leaders in the final statement expressed their condemnation concerning the anomalous movie "The Innocence of Muslims" put online on Youtube, recognizing that "an attack against any confession is an attack on all religions." They also denounced the violent reactions that "made innocent victims and that in some Countries struck the Christians and their places of worship." The appeal to the UN, the Arab League and other international organizations was re-launched to take action against those who exploit in a distorted manner the warning to the legitimate freedom of expression to insult religious beliefs and feelings, that undermine social peace. In practice, the participants in the summit in Bkerké decided to set up a committee of Christians and Muslims jurists who have to elaborate a text intended to protect religions from all forms of denigration. The Lebanese Committee of Christian-Muslim dialogue was commissioned to follow up the matter.

The difficulties of daily life suffered by all Lebanese were not left out of the talks in Bkerké. Religious leaders examined the many phenomena in which the national and regional worrying socio-economic crisis declines: the increase of the public debt and the cost of living, the loss of purchasing power of wages, the impoverishment of the middle class and an increase in criminal practices such as extortion and kidnapping. All leaders agreed on the appeal to national institutions and political forces so that the collapse of the national industry is warded off. In particular, political leaders have been called to abandon sectarianism in order to contribute together to establish "an atmosphere of calm and confidence."

In his speech at the opening of the summit, the Maronite Patriarch Bechara Boutros Raï used alarming words on the socio-economic situation of the country, calling it "unsustainable": "We must put an end to this deterioration," said the head of the Maronite Church, "because if economy collapses, everything will collapse." (GV) (Agenzia Fides 25/09/2012)