



## **ASIA/LEBANON - The Maronite Church: new electoral law and voting rights for the Lebanese abroad**

Bkerke (Agenzia Fides) - The debate on the electoral law is a "top priority." It should set aside the 1960 model, used in the last election in 2009, because it does not guarantee "a fair representation of the electorate." And above all, the new law will have to grant expatriates the right to vote, in the respect of equality between Muslims and Christians, as enshrined in the Constitution. These are some indications on behalf of the Maronite Episcopate, gathered these days under the presidency of Patriarch Bechara Boutros Raï. The Bishops underline the urgent need for electoral reform that "ensures the freedom of vote" and points to "safeguard the election result from any potential manipulation."

In a statement sent to Fides Agency, the Assembly calls for concrete steps to ensure full democratic voting, scheduled for June 2013: to establish an independent commission to monitor the election; ensure full freedom of access to the media for all candidates; combat vote buying.

In the debate on the electoral law, in view of the upcoming political consultations, political Lebanese blocks contrast each other with growing animosity. The electoral law in force during the 2009 elections was characterized by a majoritarian system and by the division of Lebanon into several small constituencies (corresponding roughly to the district Qada'), characterized by strong confessional homogeneity. This model is now considered inadequate by most political acronyms. Proportionalist hypothesis, supported by the Shiite Hezbollah, are opposed to projects based on small electoral constituencies, such as the one presented by the party of Samir Geagea's Lebanese Forces. (GV) (Agenzia Fides 29/09/2012)