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AFRICA/MALI - "All Christians were forced to flee from the north of Mali, even Muslims victims of extremism," says a missionary

Bamako (Agenzia Fides) - "In the north of Mali, all Christians were forced to flee" the complaint in an interview with Aid to the Church in Need, Fr. Laurent Balas, a missionary of the White Fathers, who spent six years in Gao in northern Mali before being appointed pastor of the Church of the Holy Martyrs of Uganda in Bamako. "My Gao successors were forced to flee," said Fr. Balas describing the conquest of the north of the Country in the spring of this year on behalf of the Islamic militias.
Christians fleeing from the north are welcomed by the families in the south in very precarious conditions, after having left all their belongings. "There are no refugee camps in the Country, but in neighboring Countries. The displaced have been 'absorbed' by the people. It is very difficult to say how many there are, " says the missionary.
In the north Islamist groups have imposed their radical interpretation of the Sharia even reaching the point of breaking into homes in search of unveiled women. In this case the unfortunate's ear is cut. "Faced with this situation, the Muslims themselves are fleeing en masse, except that now, in the south, these families who flee put extra weight on other families who are already devasted. Therefore they go to the north, saying that they prefer to die in their own land," said the missionary.
But there is not only religious extremism at work in the north of Mali. Fr. Balas notes in fact that Islamist groups that have ties with drug traffickers, as demonstrated by a plane load of cocaine that recently crashed at an airport controlled by the Islamists. "Islamism is a screen that hides the trafficking of drugs and of possible searches of gold and oil," concludes the missionary. (L.M.) (Agenzia Fides 26/10/2012)

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