



AFRICA/MALI - Negotiations and military preparations in view of the reconquest of the north

Bamako (Agenzia Fides) - "The meetings which are taking place in Ouagadougou and Bamako are aimed at convincing a part of the groups that control the north of Mali to renounce armed struggle" says to Fides Agency Father Edmond Dembele, Secretary of the Episcopal Conference of Mali. "We are talking in particular about the MNLA (National Movement for the Independence of Azawad) and Ansar al-Dine.

In the capital of Burkina Faso, Ouagadougou, in the last days meetings were held with representatives of the two groups to convince them to give up the armed struggle and all forms of terrorism. Ansar al Dine seems to have renounced violence and negotiations continue to reach a final agreement, " says Fr. Dembele.

"Here in Bamako meetings of military experts of Mali, of ECOWAS, the African Union and some European countries to prepare for the offensive against AQIM (Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb) and other movements that do not intend to lay down their arms were held. The military plans were approved by the Chief of Staff of the ECOWAS force. "

"On the one hand progress in negotiations with armed groups in the north open to dialogue is made, on the other military operations to regain the north are actively being prepared," said the priest.

According to rumors circulating, taken by the press, the military offensive should begin in January.

"Unfortunately, the more time passes the more displaced people in the north are forgotten," says Fr. Dembele in describing the humanitarian situation. "Those who were welcomed in schools here in the south, had to find new homes, because the school year has started. The rainy season that ended in October caused the increase in the spread of infectious diseases such as cholera and malaria. Finally, the problem of feeding this mass of people remains. The probable military offensive in the north will lead to a new wave of displaced persons and refugees," adds Fr. Dembele.

The situation in areas controlled by the rebels remains precarious, and threatens not only the lives of civilians but also the cultural identity of Mali because of the destruction of important historical monuments that belong to the nation. "The destruction of the monument of independence in Tombouctou sparked a wave of indignation throughout Mali. Whoever committed this act demonstrates the will to destroy everything, not only the values of the State but also the cultural values of the nation," concludes Fr. Dembele. (L.M.) (Agenzia Fides 08/11/2012)