



AFRICA/EGYPT - Representatives of Christian Churches announce the withdrawal from the Constituent Assembly. Bishop Zaki: Egyptian identity is at risk

Cairo (Agenzia Fides) - The representatives of the Christian Churches in Egypt have announced their withdrawal from the Constituent Assembly charged with drafting the new constitution of the great North African Country. The decision, already in circulation in recent days by the new Coptic Orthodox Patriarch Tawadros II and solicited by many influential members of the Christian community, was taken yesterday in a meeting held in St. Mark's Coptic Cathedral in Cairo, which was also attended by the Coptic Catholic Bishop Yohanna Qulta and dr. Safwat al-Bayaadi, head of the Anglican Church in Egypt, members of the Constituent Assembly.

The choice of the representatives of the Christian Churches is not isolated: in the same hours, other members of the committee responsible for drafting the new Constitution - among whom also Ahmed Maher, founder of the April 6 movement and leader of the anti-Mubarak uprising - announced their auto suspension. Many have also requested to extend the period of investigation to at least three months (the publication of the final draft of the new constitution was scheduled for the end of November).

The resounding mass bail out is an attempt to withstand the extreme pressures exerted mainly by Salafi extremist sectors to impress from an Islamist point of view the new Egyptian Constitution.

Last week, representatives of the seven Catholic Churches in Egypt in Cairo organized some seminars with Christian and Muslim lawyers on the issue of the new Constitution. "The choice of Egyptian Churches " says to Fides Agency Bishop Adel Zaki, OFM, Apostolic Vicar of Alexandria "is not a confessional battle: what is at stake is the very identity of Egypt, and what Egypt has always represented in the chorus of Arab nations, with its thousand-year experience of cohabitation between communities of different faiths. The new currents, which are exploiting the religious sense of the people come from outside the Country, and in recent times they have also infiltrated ideas alien to the fabric of the Nation. They do not respect the rights of Christians in Egypt, we are all children of native Churches, born and bred in this Country. And with their sectarian tactics, they may risk dividing the entire Country.

Not surprisingly, I perceive with growing insistence the idea of separating the Sinai, or dividing the Upper Egypt from the Lower Egypt." (GV) (Agenzia Fides 16/11/2012)