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AFRICA/NIGERIA - "Firmness and dialogue with the sympathizers to stop Boko Haram," said Cardinal-elect Onaiyekan

Rome (Agenzia Fides) - Abuja is the new capital of Nigeria, where all faiths and ethnic groups in the country are represented. In this sense it is a training ground for dialogue, said Cardinal-elect Mgr. John Olorunfemi Onaiyekan, Archbishop of Abuja at the opening of the press conference held yesterday in Rome. Mgr. Onaiyekan said he was surprised by the appointment decided by Pope Benedict XVI, because becoming "Cardinal should not be a goal of a man of the Church," but rather a commitment to work even harder to serve others.
The Archbishop of Abuja did not recoil from the questions of journalists gathered in the national headquarters of the Catholic Action, on the situation in Nigeria, and in particular on anti-Christian violence carried out by the Boko Haram group. Mgr. Onaiyekan stressed that relations between Christians and Muslims are generally good, but a group of a thousand men armed is enough to create chaos in a Country of 160-170 million people ("we do not know exactly how many we are, statistics is not our strong point," he added jokingly). The Cardinal-elect also revealed that among the victims of Boko Haram there are many Muslims (the number is probably higher than that of the Christian victims), including some religious leaders who condemned the crimes committed by the group. "It is the State's duty to defend us. We as Christians can take security measures to protect ourselves but we will not be armed. This is not our task," said Mgr. Onaiyekan, pointing out that the attacks against churches have not emptied them: the faithful do not escape from giving testimony of faith, even under the threat of an attack. Mgr. Onaiyekan finally believes that who has to deal with Boko Haram are the police operations to arrest those who commit crimes and to establish dialogue especially with those who, though not belonging directly to the group, are sympathizers. (L.M.) (Agenzia Fides 23/11/2012)

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