



## **AFRICA/EGYPT - Coptic Catholic Bishop Kyrillos: the day after the meeting of Catholic bishops with Patriarch Tawadros; Christians will vote according to their conscience in the referendum**

Cairo (Agenzia Fides) - The meeting scheduled for today between a delegation of Catholic Bishops and the Egyptian Coptic Orthodox Patriarch Tawadros II has been postponed to after tomorrow. The postponement is confirmed to Fides Agency by the Bishop of Assiut, Kyrillos William, Patriarchal Vicar of the Catholic Copts. "On that occasion," adds to Fides Anba Kyrillos "we will consult also to agree on a common line in front of the constitutional referendum." The Coptic Catholic Bishop would like to emphasize that even before the latest developments in the Egyptian crisis the leaders of the Christian Churches have tried to share a homogenous position: "The leaders of the Catholic Church" says to Fides Anba Kyrillos "were contacted and invited one by one to attend the ceremony of the draft Constitution to President Morsi. We consulted with our Coptic Orthodox and Protestant brothers, and we decided not to go. The same thing happened when President Morsi called the churches to intervene in the dialogue with the social partners and the oppositions. Before the referendum, we will hear what Pope Tawadros has to tell us. And we wait to see what happens even today, with contemporary demonstrations organized by opponents and supporters of the new Constitution. "

According to the Bishop of Assiut, the new Constitution does not reflect the desire of all Egyptians, but only the prospect of a hegemonic party: "Faced with this scenario, some say that one should boycott the referendum and those who support say one has to attend and vote no. We will evaluate the reasons of one or the other. But I suppose that as a church we will not give our faithful an indication of what to do."

According Anba Kyrillos, the choice not to provide binding rules to vote is likely to be followed also by leaders of the Coptic Orthodox Church, and corresponds to a new version of the relationship between hierarchy and faithful before politics: "Also our Coptic Orthodox brothers have learned from the lessons of the past. Pope Tawadros, prompted by the political authorities to involve the Coptic Church in supporting national dialogue, said that the Church is a religious institution and that political dialogue is up to the political and social groups. I see an appreciable break with the past. The predecessor, Pope Shenouda, had his charisma even as a political leader, which could be seen in his clashes with Egyptian Presidents. With the Revolution on 25 January, the Coptic Christians also discovered to be the protagonists of the political choices, and not executors of the indications of the hierarchy. We have to serve the faithful, recognizing that in politics Christians are citizens like others and are mature enough to make their choices freely, following their formed and felt consciences." (GV). (Agenzia Fides 11/12/2012).