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AFRICA/EGYPT - Christian Churches: no to the boycott of the constitutional referendum

Cairo (Agenzia Fides) - The leaders of the Christian Churches in Egypt will not support the boycott of the Referendum on the draft of the Constitution - scheduled on 15 and 22 December - at the center of political and social conflict which has been shaking the great north- African Country for weeks. The recommendation that comes from church leaders is to go to the polls and express one's vote freely and conscientiously. The decision to invite the faithful to participate in the referendum was also confirmed at the meeting between the Coptic Orthodox Patriarch Tawadros II and qualified delegation of the Egyptian Catholic Churches, which yesterday went to pay him homage after the recent enthronement.

The Auxiliary Bishop of Alexandria of the Catholic Copts, Botros Fahim Awad Hanna, tells Fides Agency: "It was an unofficial meeting. Political issues were not on the agenda. But even in this context, Patriarch Tawadros repeated that we will encourage our people to go to the polls without giving explicit directions to vote, and urging everyone to choose freely, according to their own conscience. If the Churches in Egypt expressed themselves for the boycott, it would have exposed herself to accuses of fomenting the opposition, and it would have been a catastrophe. Moreover –stresses Anba Botros even between the political groups leading the protest the choice to participate in the referendum and to vote no rather than to boycott the polls prevails."

In yesterday's meeting, the new Coptic Orthodox Patriarch confirmed his cautious and oriented attitude to indicate a certain distance of the Coptic Orthodox Church from the strictly political issues. Bishop Botros Hanna reveals to Fides Agency a particularly eloquent fact: "Since we are in the period of Advent, we proposed to Pope Tawadros to announce three days of fasting with the intention to seek a peaceful solution to the problems and conflicts that are plaguing the Country. He advised to postpone such initiative, saying that we must be careful and that in this period even such an initiative could also be interpreted unequivocally as an attempt to transform the Christian practice of fasting in a form of political protest."

During the meeting, Patriarch Tawadros also confirmed his ecumenical sensitivity: he mentioned his numerous meetings with representatives and Catholic communities and expressed the desire to live in an ever more intense fraternal charity, emphasizing that especially in the present context all Christians are called to speak with one voice.

The Catholic delegation, led by the Bishop of Assiut, Kyrillos William, Patriarchal Vicar of the Catholic Copts, was composed of about forty people. Six Bishops of different rites, fifteen priests, some lay people and some Superiors of female religious congregations working in Egypt. (GV) (Agenzia Fides 14/12/2012).

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