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ASIA/IRAQ - Archbishop Sako says Premier al-Maliki is right: the West must not finance the flight of Christians

Kirkuk (Agenzia Fides) - The countries of Europe and the West "should help Iraqi Christians to remain in their homeland rather than investing resources in assistance programs that actually encourage their escape." The Chaldean Archbishop of Kirkuk, Louis Sako denounced the Western policies that ultimately accelerate the hemorrhage of Christians from Iraq. Monsignor Sako thinks there are perhaps unintended effects of the practice adopted in many Western nations towards the local Christian communities, the targets of attack and harassment. "Countries such as France, Germany, Sweden and Australia," explains to Fides Agency Archbishop Sako "easily grant visas to Christian families, and when they arrive in the West, they offer them a home and a monthly allowance. This reception, though made with good intentions, ends up encouraging the flight of Christians. These, once they arrive in their new country, often lose contact with the community of origin, they isolate themselves, and very often they also lose their faith." According to Mgr. Sako, it would be more useful in Iraq to divert lavish resources on these reception
programs: "Western countries - suggests the Archbishop - instead of promoting emigration, through the network of parishes and creating ad hoc committees they could encourage Iraqi Christians to remain in their lands, financing projects in agriculture, education and trade, and promoting the creation of jobs."
Yesterday, the Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al Maliki urged "the European Union countries to refrain from encouraging the emigration of Iraqi Christians." The Premier expressed his call in the re-consecration ceremony of the Syrian Catholic Cathedral of Our Lady of Salvation, which took place with the participation of Cardinal Leonardo Sandri, Prefect of the Congregation for the Eastern Churches. The church, in the district of al-Karada, in central Baghdad, on 31 October 2010 had been attacked by terrorists of a group linked to al-Qaeda. The bloody action had caused among Christians 58 victims - including two priests - and over a hundred people were injured. "That church," emphasizes Archbishop Sako "was renewed after it had been washed by the blood of martyrs. This recalls what Tertullian already described: the blood of the martyrs is the seed of new Christians. Even the new consecration of that place of worship and prayer can help Christians to renew themselves internally."
At the ceremony, Prime Minister al-Maliki also revealed that he had asked Pope Benedict XVI "to intervene to encourage Christians to stay in Iraq, so that the East is not emptied of Christians, as the West is not emptied Muslims " (GV) (Agenzia Fides 15/12/2012).

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