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ASIA/LEBANON - Media linked to Hezbollah pay homage to the Christian feast of Christmas

Beirut (Agenzia Fides) - In Lebanon the Christmas period is also marked by the unique media coverage affiliated with Hezbollah dedicated to the Christian celebrations. On Christmas Day, December 25, the Al-Nour radio paid tribute to the birth of Christ with a selection of hymns. The main TV channel linked to the Shiite political formation articulated its programming with a Christmas card addressed to Christians, while the information services devoted considerable space to the Christmas celebrations, highlighting the participation of Hezbollah's representatives in official ceremonies and underlining the title of "prophet " recognized by Islam to "Jesus the son of Mary." Even the Iranian embassy in Beirut distributed best wishes cards that celebrated the feast for the birth of the "Prophet Jesus, son of Mary."
"The promptness of many Muslim media in their best wishes for the Christmas celebration - says to Fides Agency Fr. Paul Karam, National Director of the Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS) in Lebanon - refers to the specificity of the traditional Lebanese life, where Christians and Muslims share a certain sociability also at the level of religious festivals. When I was little, before the war, I remember my parents who would go to our Muslim neighbors during Ramadan and other Islamic holidays, while they came to us at Christmas and Easter. These days, even many children of the twenty families of Syrian Muslim refugees hosted in the neighborhood, came to the parish to take small Christmas gifts, as the children of Christian refugees did. "
The attitude of the various religious and political Lebanese components before the Christian celebration of Christmas reflects in part the logic of belonging to opposing sides in the delicate and uncertain phase experienced by the Country of the cedars. For example, the media linked to the Free Patriotic Movement – the Maronite Christian formation led by General Michel Aoun and allied with the Shiite Hezbollah – gave wide coverage to the campaigns of local Salafi groups against the Christian Christmas, underlining the Sunni matrix of Salafi fundamentalism. Extensive services documented the pressures on the municipality of Tripoli - the city where the Salafis groups significantly have their influence - to minimize the Christmas decorations in the streets and squares, which they label as blasphemous and contrary to Islamic teachings .
In sync with the campaigns fed by different leaders and Islamist groups in other Muslim-majority Countries, including Lebanon's Salafi leader Omar Bakri Fostock (known as the "Ayatollah from Tottenham" for the key role he played in Islamist cells in London in the years of his stay in the United Kingdom) who had warned Muslims not to take part in the celebrations with their Christian compatriots baptized, labeling this practice shared by many Muslims as a form of "heresy" contrary to the true Islam. (GV) (Agenzia Fides 03/01/2013)

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