



## **AFRICA/MALI - The local population is comforted by the French military intervention; the Church in aid of the displaced**

Bamako (Agenzia Fides) - "The Malian population is greatly comforted by the French military intervention. After jihadist groups had taken the city of Konna on January 10, Malians had in fact held their breath, fearing that the rebel offensive could reach far to the south, " says to Fides Agency Don Edmond Dembele, Secretary of the Episcopal Conference of Mali. The French military intervention has allowed us to reject the advance of the jihadist movements and recapture Konna (see Fides 10/01/2013; 11/01/2013), while the air force in Paris continues to hit rebel positions in different areas of northern Mali.

"Even the people in the north, occupied by the rebels, look with hope to the military operations, even if they are worried about the bombing and do not know what the reaction of jihadists will be before leaving the city occupied by them. In any case they are waiting for land offensive, which will be conducted by Malian troops in competition with those of ECOWAS (Community of West African States)," said Don Dembele.

"In Bamako there are some Nigerian officials to coordinate the arrival of the ECOWAS troops that are expected in the next 48-72 hours. Nigeria, Benin, Togo, Ivory Coast, Niger and Burkina Faso have promised to send their troops " says the priest.

"The civilians in Sévaré and Konna tried to flee from the combat zone, but only a few managed to do it," says Don Dembele. "The Church in the Mopti area (the most important center near the the fighting area) is trying to help the displaced. Next week there will be a meeting of the Episcopal Conference during which decisions will be taken to better coordinate the Church's humanitarian efforts" concludes Don Dembele. (L.M.) (Agenzia Fides 14/01/2013)