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# AFRICA/MALI - First signs of liberation for the cities of the north, but fear still remains

Bamako (Agenzia Fides) - "The people of the great urban centers of northern Mali abandoned by Islamist groups, are showing the first signs of liberation from the Islamist domination: women take off their veil, young people have started to smoke outside and couples walking freely in the streets," says to Fides Agency Don Edmond Dembele, Secretary General of the Episcopal Conference of Mali.
"The inhabitants of the northern cities, however, are afraid, because if it is true that the jihadists have released them, one knows that a part of these have mixed with the population, waiting for the military developments. One knows that to definitely liberate the north one needs to wait for the ground offensive," continues Don Dembele.
For fear of a return of the Islamists, several tens of thousands of people from the north of Mali have taken refuge in Mauritania in the south of Mali.
Meanwhile, fighting continues between the French and Malian troups, on the one hand, and jihadist groups, on the other, in Konna (center) and Diabali (west). "The French army has deployed several dozen soldiers in the capital, Bamako, officially to ensure the safety of French citizens living there, but in fact ensuring control of the city," concludes the priest. (L.M.) (Agenzia Fides 17/01/2013)

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