



ASIA/JAPAN - Bishops tell Prime Minister Shinzo Abe: "No arms, no nuclear power, the Constitution cannot be changed"

Tokyo (Agenzia Fides) – It is urgently necessary to safeguard article 9 of Japan's Constitution which declares "explicit and absolute renouncement of war" on the part of the government. A clear "no" must be pronounced regarding rearmament and the use of nuclear energy for civilian or military purposes: Fides was informed of an appeal launched by the Catholic Bishops to Japan's Prime Minister, Mr Shinzo Abe, on the occasion of his meeting with America's President Barak Obama.

General elections in December 2012, brought the Democratic Party led by di Shinzo Abe back into power, and its programme includes a revision of article 9 of the Constitution which would transform Japan into a country able to "collaborate with or engage in war". Prime Minister Abe, meeting with President Obama yesterday in Washington, confirmed the strategic and military alliance with the United States, interested in increasing their geopolitical influence in eastern Asia.

In the face of a concrete possibility to lead the nation towards an attitude "potentially belligerent", Japan's Catholic bishops are making their voices heard. In a statement, of which a copy was sent to Fides, signed by Bishop Marcellino Daiji Tani, Bishop of Saitama and head of the Justice and Peace Commission of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Japan, the Bishops launch a "strong warning to the government": they affirm "We believe that peace can never be reached with military force. We believe that solely through patient dialogue, open to diversity, it is possible to build justice, equality and reciprocal respect between peoples and between nations". In the statement sent to Fides, the Bishops say "any change in article 9 of our Constitution would entail the risk of increasing military tension in Asia, particularly with China and North Korea, and a consequent race for militarisation". "Without article 9 – the statement continues – Japan could become another nuclear power, regressing in efforts made to abolish nuclear weapons in the world". The Bishops remind US President Obama that "the government of the United States played an important role in the drafting of Japan's present Constitution, centred on the value of peace". Today, they explain, "the majority of the people in this country supports and shares a non-violent Constitution". Therefore the Bishops urge the government to proceed along the path of "non violence" and cooperation with all the nations of eastern. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 23/2/2013)