



## **ASIA/LEBANON - Patriarch Rai: Soon a summit between the Orthodox and Catholic Patriarchs of the Middle East**

Rome (Agenzia Fides) - "We are preparing a meeting of all Orthodox and Catholic Patriarchs of the Middle East, to promote unity among Christians and deal with the problems and suffering that we share in this difficult moment in history." This was announced to Fides Agency by Cardinal Bechara Boutros Rai, Patriarch of Antioch of the Maronites, in these days in Rome to attend the conclave.

The summit with the Patriarchs in the Middle East will be an important network of ecumenical contacts which in recent months have involved the Head of the Maronite Church, created a cardinal by Benedict XVI in the Consistory of 24 November 2012. Earlier that month, S. B. Rai had attended the enthronement of the new Coptic Orthodox Pope Tawadros II. On 10 February, he was the only patriarch present at this enthronement of the new Greek-Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch Yohanna X Yazigi, which took place in Damascus. In the coming days the ministry of the new Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby (commitment canceled because of the Conclave) should have taken place. "The opportunity to return to a complete unity," Patriarch Rai explains to Fides "is studied at high levels. Meanwhile, we can live communion at a concrete level of the evangelical proclamation and sharing of social, charitable and cultural initiatives. We are talking about concrete ecumenism, without much talking. It is ecumenism that many baptized are already living in their daily lives."

S. B. Rai has had recent meetings with the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople Bartholomew I and the Orthodox Archbishop of Athens Hieronymos. From February 26 to March 1, before coming to Rome for the Conclave, Patriarch Rai visited the Russian capital at the invitation of Patriarch Kirill of Moscow. During the muscovite trip, The Head of the Maronite Church had long conversations with Kirill and the Metropolitan Hilarion (head of the department of the Patriarchate of Moscow for external relations) around the current plight of Christians in the Middle East. S. B. Rai in Moscow also met the President of Duma Sergei Naryshkin with some of his collaborators, expressing appreciation for the line in favor of a negotiation between the regime and the opposition assumed by Russia on the Syrian conflict. (GV) (Agenzia Fides 06/03/2013).