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AFRICA/SOMALIA - "I found signs of hope," said Bishop Bertin who has just returned from Mogadishu

Mogadishu (Agenzia Fides) - "I found concrete signs of hope even if the new state institutions are not yet in full control of the situation," says to Fides Agency His Exc. Mgr. Giorgio Bertin, Bishop of Djibouti and Apostolic Administrator of Mogadishu who has just returned from a visit to the Somali capital.
"I went back to Mogadishu after 6 years of absence," said the Bishop. "I visited the old town, the Medina area and that towards the fifth, sixth, seventh kilometer, and the thing that struck me most is the absence of checkpoints of the various militias." I therefore had the impression of a city no longer divided but unified. Another thing that struck me is that one does not hear shootings, apart from a couple of gunshots. I saw several entrepreneurs who are trying to rebuild and refurbish buildings. These are all signs of hope," he points out.
"My visit had several purposes," continues Mgr. Bertin. "On the one hand to check the humanitarian situation. During these years, Caritas Somalia has managed to maintain its activities through local partners. One of these relates to the camps of internally displaced persons. These are either Mogadishu residents who lost their homes due to the war, or, and they are the majority of cases, people coming from inside due to insecurity or because of the drought." Mgr.Bertin traveled to Somalia with Sara Fumagalli, coordinator of "Humanitarian Padania", onlus has already established small aid programs and intends to try to open a humanitarian corridor to send hospital equipment .
Humanitarian work is, however, difficult: "Despite the improved weather conditions, it is difficult to imagine a short return of displaced persons in rural areas, because these are still in the hands of the Shabaab," said the Bishop.
"Another aim was to check the status of the cathedral which is occupied by a group of displaced people. The building condition is terrible and we will see what we can do to recover it," said Mgr. Bertin.
"Finally we had meetings at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and that of Social Affairs, to start an agreement on the opening of our presence in a more direct way, including the reopening of a place of worship," said Mgr. Bertin. "I met open and available interlocutors but the problem is that there is a wide gap between the state institutions that have reborn and the concrete situation. If state institutions are available towards us then we must see what can be done, because the same public buildings are occupied by people who have seized them by force or by the displaced."
Despite the difficulties Mgr.Bertin does not give up and concludes: "I intend to come back soon to meet either the President or the Prime Minister or the Minister of Foreign Affairs to continue this conversation." (L.M.) (Agenzia Fides 12/04/2013)

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