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ASIA/HOLY LAND - The percentage of Christians in the Palestinian territories has halved over the last 13 years

Jerusalem (Agenzia Fides) - The percentage of Christians in the population of the Palestinian territories has halved since the year two thousand, from 2% to 1% over the last 13 years. And in Jerusalem, where in 1948, 27,000 Christians lived, today the baptized are about 5 thousand. These are some of the data collected by the research carried out by the Christian Palestinian Professor Hanna Issa, Professor of International Law and secretary general of the Islamic-Christian Committee for the protection of Jerusalem and the Holy Places, which on the basis of his studies has often referred to the declining number of Christians in Middle East as "a social disaster". In a summary text prepared by Issa - sent to Fides Agency - which currently refers to the Christians scattered in the Palestinian territories occupied by Israel in 1967 there are 47 thousand, while 110 thousand are those who live in regions where in 1948 the new Jewish state rose.
The drastic decrease of the percentage of the Christian presence in the Palestinian Territories is due to the phenomena of emigration, especially to the population growth rates much lower than those recorded in the Muslim majority component of the Palestinian population. In any case – notes Father Manuel Musallam, a longtime parish priest in Gaza and now in charge of relations with the Christian communities of the Foreign Relations Department of Fatah - a serious manner to deal with the political, economic and social factors that favor the flight of Christians is needed. One emigrates to seek new prospects for work, study and to raise a family, "From Gaza and other areas people go away for lack of minimum requirements to guarantee a dignified existence. In Jerusalem, many convinced themselves to sell their homes due to the huge figures they had as an offer ", able to ensure the transfer of the whole family in some Western Country, and access to higher levels of well-being. The Palestinian Authority – notes Father Musallam - is called to put in place measures and support of Christian permanence: the protection of the right to education for students and not penalized access to the labor market and the possibility of having a home for new families.
"On Monday, April 15," underlines the Jordanian priest Rifat Bader, director of the Catholic Center for Studies and Media, based in Amman "Pope Francis will receive the official delegation of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, led by Patriarch Fouad Twal. It is an opportunity to reaffirm our communion with the new Successor of Peter and with the universal Church. Of course, the Patriarch will invite the Pope to come to Holy Land. We will ask the Pope for prayers for the Holy Land, and also for the Christians who live there to remain in the places where Jesus lived. To the diplomacy of the Holy See we ask to continue their work for peace and justice. (GV) (Agenzia Fides 12/04/2013).

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