



ASIA/PAKISTAN - Bishops' Appeal for the elections: "Vote for those who promote harmony"

Karachi (Agenzia Fides) - "As Bishops, we invite you to vote for those who promise a free, fair, democratic, respectful society and for those who are seriously engaged in building social harmony, to create harmony among the different religions, cultures and ethnic groups living in Pakistan": this is the appeal to Fides Agency by his Exc. Mgr. Joseph Coutts, Archbishop of Karachi and President of the Episcopal Conference of Pakistan, on the eve of the general elections, to be held tomorrow, May 11. "To all Pakistani citizens and institutions – continues the Archbishop to Fides – we say: do your duty to ensure peaceful, transparent and fair elections. To all people of good will we ask you to express your vote. To the faithful Christians we want them to note that there are no Christian candidates, and that the awareness of the social and political involvement of Christians has grown over the years. We have had Christian members of Parliament and, according to the system and in effect, we are now free to vote for anyone."

The Bishops reaffirm their support for the democratic system to the existence of Islamic extremist groups such as the Pakistani Taliban, "which, in their strict interpretation, intend to make Pakistan an Islamic theocracy, saying that democracy is not good for Islam. Moderate Muslims argue that Islam and democracy are fully compatible." With regards to the plight of Christians in Pakistan, Mgr. Coutts explains: "The hope of Christians remains firm. We are a small church but not silent. We are visible in the country, despite being a small minority. In a country of 175 million inhabitants, 95% are Muslims, Christians are on the whole 3.5 million, including one million Catholics. Sometimes one suffers from the 'minority complex' that makes us feel dominated, crushed. But our presence is significant and visible: we have churches, schools and hospitals. When there are times of suffering, we make ourselves heard. We denounce injustice, prejudice and discrimination, and the awareness about our rights is growing at all levels.

Some groups and NGOs formed by Muslims such as the 'Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, support us. " A debate is being held in the country on the use of the term "minorities": "Saying 'minorities', one tends to separate, to ghettoize: we want to be called Pakistani Christians, to say that we are equal citizens. Moreover, with our works we contribute to the development and welfare of the whole country: we are building our country." In this regard, "it is urgent to eradicate - says the Archbishop - the prejudices existing in the school curriculum, where non-Muslims are portrayed negatively. One should be very careful what is taught to young people. Words are important, they create a mindset. Harmony must be built starting from the formation of the new generations." (PA) (Agenzia Fides 10/05/2013)