



## **ASIA/IRAN - Christians between hope and skepticism, after the victory of a moderate religious in the election**

Tehran (Agenzia Fides) - The victory of the moderate religious Hassan Rouhani in the recent presidential elections in Iran increases expectations and hopes among the Christian communities in the Islamic republic, although among the faithful skepticism continues to circulate.

In a note sent to Fides, the organization "Open Doors", which defends the rights of Christians and religious freedom in the world, recalls that Rouhani - who during Mohammad Khatami's presidency was among the negotiators on the issues of nuclear power - will have a say in the chapter in economic affairs and in other civil matters, and issues concerning national security and religion remain the prerogative of the supreme leader Khamenei.

Many observers see in Rouhani a victory of wisdom, moderation, a sign of growing awareness and desire to go beyond extremism. "Can Rouhani make a real difference?" Asks "Open Doors". Christian minorities in Iran, says the NGO, hope and pray "for the welfare of the people, freedom for prisoners of conscience, for the comfort to the victims of political violence, for a future of justice, freedom, equality and prosperity for Iran. "

"Open Doors" emphasizes that Iranian Christians are often imprisoned on charges of "threatening national security", only for prayer meetings in homes. The citizens of Iranian Persian-speaking ethnic group ("farsi") are by definition Muslims, therefore Christians and Persians are considered "apostates". The authorities do not allow Christian worship in Farsi. Iran is ranked eighth in the "World Watch List 2013" of "Open Doors", which monitors the persecution of Christians in the world.

The organization "Amnesty International" has sent an appeal to the new president, inviting him to follow up on promises made during the election campaign, to improve respect for human rights in Iran. Rouhani has revealed his intention to promulgate a "Charter of Civil Rights" which provides for the equality of all citizens without discrimination based on race, religion or gender, greater freedom for political parties and minorities, fair trials, freedom of assembly and legal protection for all. Rouhani's election - says Amnesty in a note sent to Fides - is an opportunity for the authorities to reiterate the importance of respect for the rule of law". (PA) (Agenzia Fides 05/07/2013)