



ASIA/ISRAEL - The Justice and Peace Commission intervenes on the recruitment of Christian Arabs into the army

Jerusalem (Agenzia Fides) - A document which has just released by the Justice and Peace Commission - a body linked to the Assembly of Ordinary Catholic Bishops of the Holy Land and presided by the Patriarch Emeritus Michel Sabbah of Jerusalem of the Latins - provides criteria for discernment on the issue of recruitment of Christian Arabs in the Israeli military, at the center of public debate in recent months. According to the authors of the document, sent to Fides Agency, the army is used as "an institution that promotes social cohesion" and a "principal place" of forming national consciousness and participating in the nation building project "as conceived by the authorities, i.e. promoting Israel as a Jewish national state". In this perspective, according to the Justice and Peace commission operating in the Holy Land, "talk about drafting of Christian Arabs rather than the Arabs in general - Muslims and Christians - is clearly an attempt to drive a wedge between Christians and Muslims in Israel". On addressing these delicate problems, the Church should keep in mind that "the army is used as a means of imposing and maintaining the occupation of Palestinian territories and thus preventing Palestinians from achieving dignity and independence". The army is primarily "an army of aggression rather than an army of defense". Therefore "the use of army service to divide the Arab population against itself is detrimental to the interests of the Arabs as a community". The document points out that "many of the Arab youth in Israel are losing their national, culture and religious identity and many no longer identify themselves as Arabs". In some places like the mixed cities "they try their best to assimilate into the Jewish majority and identify with it". In this regard, members of the Justice and Peace Commission repeat that "the task of the Church is to educate young people to accept themselves as they are, giving them a balanced human, national and Christian education" that helps them to integrate the various elements of their identity (Palestinian Arab Christian and citizen of Israel) without repressing any one of these elements.

The hope expressed in the document is that "bishops and priests must help the faithful in the midst of this crisis of identity." (GV) (Agenzia Fides 09/07/2013).