



ASIA/HOLY LAND - The President of Caritas Jerusalem: Gaza continues to be an open-air prison

Gaza (Agenzia Fides): "I was shocked by the level of poverty that I saw in Gaza. The Strip continues to be an open-air prison, closed by the sea, the embargo of Israel and now Egypt". This is how Father Raed Abusahlia, Director General of Caritas Jerusalem, summarizes the impressions recorded during the mission carried out by a delegation of the local Caritas among the population of the Gaza Strip ruled by Hamas Islamists. The report of the mission, exposed by Fr. Raed to Fides Agency, is a cry of alarm: the embargo imposed by Israel is crushing the population, which for nearly a third live below the poverty line. Now even the underground tunnels that connected the territory to Egypt have almost all been blocked with input from the Egyptian Government. "The coasts of Gaza", says Fr. Raed "are already representing an ecological disaster which may release at any moment infections and epidemics: all discharges end up in the sea, the water is black and gives off a foul smell, the fish are all dead and the fishermen cannot go fishing in the open sea because of the embargo. There is no gasoline, electricity goes off for hours and hours creating emergency situations in hospitals".

The Gaza Strip - subject to embargo by Israel since 2007 - is 41 km long and between 6 and 12 km wide. In that strip of land one million and 700 thousand inhabitants are concentrated. The Caritas delegation led by Fr. Raed has handed over to the local ministry of Health care a large amount of rare medicines so that they are distributed in local health care facilities. A portion of the stock of medicines was delivered directly to the Anglican Hospital. In the days of their stay in Gaza, the staff members were in contact with the structures and initiatives directly managed by the Caritas: the Medical Centre - in the areas of the refugee camps and the mobile clinic - where 18 workers are employed -, the Center for artificial limbs for people who are invalids due to the recent Israeli military operations (medical treatment that works in partnership with Caritas), groups of psychological relief for children traumatized by the bombing, the work of groups of volunteers in charge of distributing food parcels and small amounts of money (\$ 200) to more than 2 thousand families who have had their homes destroyed by military raids. "In that situation of daily suffering" says Fr. Raed, "the initiatives of Christians, their parishes and international agencies animated by them are an eloquent sign of witness and solidarity with all the people". The delegation was also able to take note of the action of the autonomous government in the hands of Hamas and social control exercised over the population by the Islamist political leadership which has been in power for 7 years. "Wandering the streets", notes Fr. Raed Abusahlia - the question arises: is this the State of Palestine or the emirate of Gaza? As a Palestinian I hope that the division will end soon and all embargoes removed. These people deserve to live". (GV) (Agenzia Fides 17/07/2013).