



ASIA/SYRIA - The Nobel Maguire at the Vatican: "Non-violence and dialogue are the only path to peace"

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - Non-violence, dialogue, reconciliation and peace are "the key words to solve the Syrian crisis." They are "the only possible way to avoid a regional degeneration of the conflict, with unpredictable outcomes". These are "the values that the Catholic Church strongly promotes, according to the Gospel message of Jesus Christ": This is what Mairead Maguire, Nobel Prize for Peace in 1976 for her commitment to solving the conflict in Northern Ireland said in an interview with Fides Agency. Maguire was in the Vatican in past days, where she held talks with the Secretary for Relations with States, Archbishop Dominique Mamberti, and the President of the Pontifical Council "Justice and Peace", Cardinal Peter Turkson. "I expressed the desire to meet Pope Francis and return home full of hope that a strong message of peace will come from the Holy See in support of peace in Syria", she explained to Fides.

"During the conversations, we agreed that the Catholic Church must promote a strong message of peace for Syria. A very clear message of non-violence and reconciliation are urgently needed as roads to peace. They are the paths that Jesus chose", explains Maguire, who is Catholic, and responsible of the NGO "Peace People" in Belfast. "The world needs a message of peace, a word about love towards the enemy and forgiveness. If this message is not spread by the Church, who can offer it?" She notes.

Speaking to Fides about the Syrian scenario, the Nobel notes that "the situation today is very complicated due to new outbreaks, violence and weapons. The figures related to the victims are frightening and, as the UN said, compared only to the Rwandan genocide. Now, after two years of conflict, it is necessary to stop and to support those who seek to bring people together, to propose dialogue again, starting with a cease-fire and put an end to indiscriminate violence. A political solution should be strongly reconsidered".

Maguire made a trip to Syria last May, at the head of a delegation of peace: "We were in Syria and in Lebanon, visiting the refugee camps.

We participated in interfaith prayer meetings. We met ordinary people, members of the government and the opposition. Most of the groups, civil and religious, call for dialogue and pushes for peace. The population is tired of death, violence and destruction". "We cannot but reiterate - she continues - that peace, reconciliation are the supreme good and many people in Syria have chosen this path. There are many initiatives from below, perhaps little known, like that of the 'Mussalaha' movement, supported by Patriarch Gregory III Laham".

In concrete, Maguire suggests, "we need to provide technical and material support to promote a de-escalation of the conflict. You have to talk to everyone and restart national dialogue between the government and opposition, tracing a transition, while respecting the principle of self-determination, asking the Syrian people what they want".

Maguire proposes to apply the model that brought peace to North Ireland, in a society where hate and division were rooted: "We started to promote friendship, forgiveness and reconciliation from the bottom, and then bring them to a political and institutional level. This can also happen for Syria, but the weapons must be silent. The international community should support those who promote this approach for an inclusive dialogue", she concludes. (PA) (Agenzia Fides 24/07/2013)