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AMERICA/COLOMBIA - "The protests of farmers in Catatumbo are justified," says the Bishop President of "Prodepaz"

Bogota (Agenzia Fides) - "The protests of farmers in Catatumbo are justified. It is true that they have come to extreme measures, and no one can agree with this, but I think that the same situation experienced by Colombian farmers is lived in different parts of the country": This is what was said to Fides by Msg. Leonardo Gómez Serna, O.P., Bishop emeritus of Magangué, Colombia, and president of the "Red de Programas de Desarrollo y Paz" (Network for Peace and Development programs - "Prodepaz"), who has been in charge, for several years, of the Prelature of Bertrania, in the area of Catatumbo, one of the poorest areas of Colombia in the northern department of Santander.
The strong social inequality and extreme poverty, coupled with the high concentration of companies and oil fields, have generated a social protest on behalf of the farmers who have blocked the streets and ask the government to protect their community life and the natural heritage of the area.
In the text sent to Fides, Mgr. Gómez Serna said: "In this region the problems we had 30 years ago are the same problems we have today. At the time there were no schools. The Church, in that period, organized a program of missionary teachers to provide education to children and the training of communities based on the values of the Gospel of Jesus. But the economic problems, public services, roads, infrastructure persist. We hope that now, after the ongoing talks in Havana between the government and the FARC guerrillas, and after what has happened in Catatumbo, the government recognizes that it has to invest in rural areas also in technology, education and health".
The Bishop spoke at the conclusion of the "Week of Reflection" of "RedProdePaz" held in Cajica (North of Bogota) from 15 to 19 July, where the problem of development of the various regions within the country were discussed.
The problem of land in Catatumbo (see Fides 15/07/2013) saw the participation of the Church as an institution that tried to mediate between the government and farmers with regards to a very complex issue at a social and political level. (CE) (Agenzia Fides 24/07/2013)

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