



## **ASIA/SYRIA - A small "WYD" in the city of Aleppo**

Aleppo (Agenzia Fides) - On the day that Pope Francis celebrated the concluding Mass of World Youth Day in Rio de Janeiro, even Christian children in the martyred city of Aleppo came together to experience a day of prayer and communion of spirit with three million of their peers gathered on Copacabana beach and to help them keep together the hope, even in the suffering and struggle that marks their daily condition. On Sunday, July 28, about 850 young Christians belonging to all the Christian communities of the Syrian cities gathered at the Youth Center George and Matilda Salem, animated by the Salesian Fathers in the district of al-Sabeel, where they shared a day of reflection, prayer, discussion and entertainment. Four Catholic bishops took part in the day, celebrating Mass and dividing the tasks in the various moments of reflection and prayer. Everything ended with the consecration of the young people of Syria to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. The Armenian Catholic Bishop Boutros Marayati describes his emotion and shared experience with the young people of Aleppo to Fides Agency: "I was amazed to see so many young people without fear, in a city scarred by war. They all bore witness to a certain inner peace that is a gift of the Lord. The perception of the tenderness of Jesus for each of them has strengthened, and many are beginning to think about consecrating themselves to the Lord in prayer and in service of others. We made the most of the words that Francis Pope had said in the early days of World Youth Day, with his call not to allow anyone to steal hope. Those words lit up our whole day". The description of the Armenian Catholic Bishop dwells at length on the miracle of inner peace which he perceived in the young Christians of Aleppo: "They tried to contact the young people in Rio through skype" says to Fides Mgr. Marayati "but the internet lines were not working. The atmosphere was relaxed, boys and girls did not seem taken from the anguish of feeling under siege or having to fear the future as Christians. Despite the high number of participants in the meeting, there was no protective measure. And thank God, everything went well". (GV) (Agenzia Fides 02/08/2013).