



ASIA/PHILIPPINES - Christmas for refugees of Typhoon Haiyan, between hunger and risk of child abuse

Manila (Agenzia Fides) - Hundreds of thousands of people are suffering poverty and deprivation "just like Jesus and his parents, struggling to survive in the rubble caused by the worst typhoon that ever hit the Philippines. It will be a difficult Christmas, marked by hunger and suffering for the refugees camped under makeshift tents or plastic sheeting": this is how Fr. Shay Cullen, SSC, a missionary from San Colombano, in the Philippines since 1969, known for his social and pastoral commitment, describes in a message sent to Fides Agency, the Christmas of the victims of the recent typhoon Haiyan that hit the Philippine province in Leyte, causing more than 5,000 victims and thousands of displaced. "In addition to wind, rain and devastation, now comes another storm: that of human exploitation and trafficking of children, who are in the sights of unscrupulous traffickers", warns the missionary.

In evacuation centers in Leyte there is a rescue team of the "Prey" Foundation, created by the missionary to assist children: "You can see posters showing photos of children between 3 to 15 years of age who have mysteriously disappeared, probably kidnapped and sold. Five children have been rescued by social workers: they had been lured by traffickers. These were foreigners who said they wanted to bring them in Manila: it was probably for the purpose of sexual exploitation", says Fr. Cullen.

"More than one million children are victims of prostitution and sexual exploitation, and will spend a terrible Christmas in the Philippines", continued the missionary. At Christmas, it is necessary to proclaim "the human rights of the poor and oppressed, the hungry", reiterates Fr. Cullen. "Christmas - he concludes - is a symbol of life and friendship. It is a time to strengthen our spiritual values, reflecting on the mystery of life, renewing our faith and finding our strength to act to save the exploited, the abused and those who are hungry". (PA) (Agenzia Fides 20/12/2013)