



ASIA/HOLY LAND - Patriarch Twal: defending the Palestinians did not mean being against Israel

Jerusalem (Agenzia Fides) - The problems and conflicts between Israelis and Palestinians will end only when we recognize the crucial role of religion in the peace process, because "we cannot indeed claim to find a solution without taking into account the spiritual dimension of this land".

This is what the Patriarch of Jerusalem Fouad Twal Latin said to the U.S. official Shaun Casey during a meeting focused on the vital contribution that religious communities are called to offer to bring peace to the Holy Land. Casey is the head of the Office of Faith-Based Community Initiatives, an organization linked to the U.S. State Department and set up by the Secretary of State John Kerry with the mission to renew and strengthen the role of religious communities in the foreign policy of the United States. In the meeting, which took place on Monday, February 17 - and whose contents were released from sources of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem - both the U.S. envoy and the Patriarch expressed high expectations with regards to the upcoming visit of Pope Francis to the Holy Land. Casey reiterated that the protection of Christians and freedom of worship and access to the holy places are at the heart of the concerns of the Vatican and the United States. In particular, the current U.S. Secretary of State - assured Casey - "is aware of the power of faith in the peace process", and has been "attentive to the concerns of the Christians in the Holy Land" and hopes even to put in place the framework of the agreement before the Pope's visit. "Of course", said Casey, "speaking to the Pope during his next visit will be important to help the two peoples to move in this direction". On his behalf, the Patriarch welcomed the establishment of the faith-based initiatives office whose role will be crucial in the peace process. For His beatitude Twal, Jerusalem must remain "an open city for the two peoples and three religions".

"Defending the Palestinians", said the Patriarch, "did not mean being against Israel". "Everyone should realize how peace would be beneficial not only for human rights, but also economically for both parties", declared Shaun Casey. (GV) (Agenzia Fides 19/02/2014)