



## **AFRICA/SOUTH AFRICA - South African Bishops: "Go and vote, because this right has been won with blood"**

Johannesburg (Agenzia Fides) - "The national election represents a referendum on the ANC's performance in government", said the Southern Africa's Catholic weekly "The Southern Cross", sent to Fides Agency, dedicated to the legislative and local elections to be held on May 7. The African National Congress (ANC) has governed the Country since the end of the apartheid regime. "At a national level the question - says the editorial - is not whether the ANC will lose power, but by what margins it will retain it".

The editor points out that "South Africa's democracy is handicapped by the absence of an opposition that might pose an electoral threat to the ANC nationally, and empower the electorate to hold the government accountable for its failures through the ballot box". For this reason, the editorial continues, "South Africans have no confidence in the democratic system and do not plan to vote".

"The Southern Cross", underlines, however, that 20 years after the end of apartheid and the fifth democratic election, South Africa has the ability to change ("the voters have the freedom to write a new chapter in the country's history"), despite the many problems that still afflict society: racial bias, mass poverty, unemployment, infrastructural and social service delivery to the poor, sexual and general violence, deficient education, and so on. To these problems the Country has added a widespread attitude of xenophobia towards African migrants. There have been some successes, of course. As the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference and the Leadership Conference of Consecrated Life note in their joint pastoral letter, statistics relating to houses built, water provided, electricity supplied, roads constructed, health facilities created, social grants implemented are some of the few indicators of the improvement of lives brought about by democracy. For this reason, the editorial concludes, it is necessary to encourage South Africans to vote and then go to the polls, "because the right to vote was won with the blood of those who fought for this universal law". (L.M.) (Agenzia Fides 19/02/2014)