



## **AMERICA/COLOMBIA - Colombians deported from Venezuela: Catholic Bishops in border area dioceses work to provide assistance and promote peace**

Cucuta (Agenzia Fides) – Bishops in dioceses along the border between Colombia and Venezuela have welcomed the initiative by Venezuela's head of state, Nicolas Maduro, to convoke a national peace conference on Wednesday 26 February to try to put an end to a three week long social crisis which has left many people dead, others wounded, in a situation of widespread violence. A local source told Fides News Agency that the crisis is causing serious unrest also along the border where the local residents, besides suffering from shortage of food and partial block on communications, also strive to assist large numbers of deported Colombians arriving from Venezuela .

“We are deeply concerned about the plight of Colombians driven out of Venezuela – said Bishop Julio César Vidal Ortiz of Cúcuta, -. They have families in Venezuela. They are being arrested, their papers confiscated and they are sent back to Colombia and this is causing conflict...we are doing our best to assist them through the Food Bank and through the Scalabrinian Fathers, because these people arrive here destitute ”.

According to the same local source, the Bishop of Cúcuta added: "we are praying with the people and we are also organising a special Meeting because we are determined to express our presence with a witness of peace. The Meeting will be attended by the Bishops of the all dioceses along the border with Venezuela, from Maracaibo to Apure, together with all the Bishops along the Colombian border, from Guajira to Arauca". The date of the Meeting is expected to be announced this week. In the meantime the Bishops continue to call on everyone to stay calm and show respect. Over the past few hours demonstrations held in favour of peace held in the cities of Tachira and Cucuta drew the participation of entire local populations. (CE) (Agenzia Fides, 24/02/2014)