



AMERICA/VENEZUELA – Christians in prayer to accompany imminent National Peace Conference

Ciudad Guayana (Agenzia Fides) – Bishop Mariano José Parra Sandoval of the diocese of Ciudad Guayana (Venezuela) and Pastor Christian Sebastia of the local Church of Jesus Christ, have urged all local Christians to take part in a special Mass for peace to accompany talks organised by the central government to restore order and peace. According to a report sent to Fides, today Wednesday 26, at 6pm local time, Mass will be celebrated in front of Ciudad Guayana Cathedral. Catholics and Christians of all denominations have been invited to gather to pray together for the grace of new energies to build a social community able to live in peace and without violence. Venezuelan President Maduro has in fact convoked a Conferencia Nacional por la Paz, national conference for peace, at Miraflores Palace (the government building), to which numerous bodies and institutions have adhered, including the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Venezuela (CEV). According to the local media, the main opposition member, Henrique Capriles, has refused the invitation to the talks because in his opinion Palacio Miraflores can never be a place for dialogue as long as it is the home of "plans for oppression", and he formally requested the Catholic Church in Venezuela to assume the guaranteed mediation of peace talks.

At a press conference to present the initiative of general prayers, Bishop Parra Sandoval reaffirmed: "we must all respect the laws of the country", recalling "the right to peaceful protest and freedom of expression" stressing that difficulties can never be overcome with violence.

For his part, Pastor Sebastia lamented the rising number of episodes of violence in recent days, and deplored the fact that some citizens preferred violence to the path of dialogue: "Acts of violence, vandalism and intolerance have reached an unbearable level. We must all play our part in the building of peace". (CE) (Agenzia Fides, 26/02/2014)