



ASIA/HOLY LAND - The Catholic Bishops: the repetition of the word persecution of Christians plays into the hands of extremists

Jerusalem (Agenzia Fides) - The way and instrumental and misleading tones with which certain Western circles launch warnings concerning the persecution suffered by Christians in the Middle East responds to political calculations and "plays into the hands of extremists". This is what the Bishops of the Assembly of Catholic Ordinaries of the Holy Land say, in a document released on April 2 by the Commission Justice and Peace. "Persecution! In many parts of the Western world", the Bishops point out "this word is on the people's lips. It is said that Christians are being persecuted in the Middle East today. However, what is really happening? How should we speak in truth and integrity as Christians and as Church about the suffering and violence that are going on in the region?"

There is no doubt - recognize the Catholic Bishops of the Holy Land in the text sent to Fides Agency - that the recent upheavals in the Middle East, initially called the "Arab Spring", have opened the way for extremist groups and forces that, "in the name of a political interpretation of Islam, are wreaking havoc in many countries, particularly in Iraq, Egypt and Syria. There is no doubt that many of these extremists consider Christians as infidels, as enemies, as agents of hostile foreign powers or simply as an easy target for extortion".

However, according to the document, one must point out that Christians are not the only victims of this violence and savagery. Secular Muslims, all those defined as "heretics" are being attacked and murdered, too. Not to mention that in areas where Sunni extremists dominate, Sunnis are being killed. Christians "are at times targeted precisely because they are Christians", but sometimes fall victim alongside many others who are suffering and dying in these times of death and destruction.

With the fall of authoritarian regimes that guaranteed "law and order" – continues the document – even the order the military and police had imposed crumbled. Christians had lived in relative security under dictatorial regimes. And now some of them fear that, if this strong authority disappeared, chaos and extremist groups would take over, seizing power and bringing about violence and persecution. Instead, loyalty to their faith and concern for the good of their country, should perhaps have them to speak out much earlier, telling the truth and calling for necessary reforms.

In certain circumstances the peoples of the Middle East find their only consolation and hope in Jesus' words: "Happy are those who are persecuted in the cause of right: theirs is the kingdom of heaven". However – stresses the document in a key passage, "the repetition of the word 'persecution' in some circles - usually referring only to what Christians suffer at the hands of criminals claiming to be 'Muslims' - plays into the hands of extremists, at home and abroad, whose aim is to sow prejudice and hatred, setting peoples and religions against one another". Christians and Muslims need to stand together against new forces of extremism and destruction. All Christians and many Muslims are threatened by these forces that seek to create a society devoid of Christians and where only very few Muslims will be at home. "All those who seek dignity, democracy, freedom and prosperity are under attack. We must stand together and speak out in truth and freedom. All of us Christians and Muslims must also be aware that the outside world will not make any real move to protect us. International and local political powers seek their own interests". (GV) (Agenzia Fides 03/04/2014)