



AFRICA/TANZANIA - "Violence against Christians derives from religious extremism but also from economic tensions", say the Bishops

Rome (Agenzia Fides) - "There are Muslim extremists who want to eliminate Christians from society because they think that the only religion in Tanzania should be Islam" denounces to Fides Agency His Exc. Mge. Tarcisius Ngalalekumwta, Bishop of Iringa and President of the Episcopal Conference of Tanzania, who is in Rome for the Ad Limina Apostolorum visit. "Of course these are extreme positions, which do not reflect the opinion of the majority of local Muslims. Among these, indeed, there are important representatives with whom it is possible to enter into a dialogue of peace" says the Archbishop.

The Bishops have denounced, on several occasions, the violence and intimidation against Christians in Tanzania (see Fides 22/05/2013). The most serious tensions have occurred on the island of Zanzibar, where in recent years there have been attacks on priests and Christian places of worship (see Fides 28/02/2014).

"The situation on the island is calm at the moment, because everyone's attention is focused on constitutional reforms and in particular on whether to form three governments (federal and two local for Tanganyika and Zanzibar, ed)", says to Fides Agency His Exc. Mgr. Augustine Shao, Bishop of Zanzibar.

We ask Mgr. Shao if the debate on constitutional reforms may be related to the tensions on the island. "It is difficult to know - says the Bishop - because the assaults against Christians derive from a mix of political, religious reasons, and more simply criminals. As Christians and Muslims, we have lived together peacefully for hundreds of years, so much so that mixed marriages are not uncommon". "This wave of attacks therefore must have recent motivations, which may be economic, political and even religious, arising from the spread of extremist preaching from abroad. So I think that these three aspects contribute to cause the waves of anti-Christian violence that occasionally occur in Zanzibar".

As for the religious aspect Mgr. Shao points out: "I have been living in Zanzibar for 20 years and I can say that the local Muslim community is very open and tolerant. Who preaches violence, trying to inflame the souls, comes from outside" while with regard to the economy, "in recent years there has been a sharp increase of workers from other areas of Tanzania and abroad. This has created discontent among the indigenous population and in particular among the young unemployed, who are often bypassed in finding a job by foreigners who accept lower wages". "The situation is so complex and it is difficult to find a single cause of violence against Christians", the Bishop concluded. (L.M.) (Agenzia Fides 09/04/2014)