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ASIA/INDIA - A Capuchin friar: "More schools in rural areas to ensure the right to education"

Trichy (Agenzia Fides) - The Indian Church, very active in the field of education, "has a duty to launch and manage educational institutes not only in cities but also in rural areas, to serve the poor and the marginalized. Also because today in India 65% of all Christians come from rural areas". This is what Fr. Nithiya Sagayam OFM Cap, coordinator of the "Association of the Franciscan Family in India" (AFFI) and Director of the Franciscan Center of Peace "Udhayam", in Tamil Nadu says.
In a note sent to Fides, the friar notes: "In the last 20 years, many Christian educational institutes and other minorities have veered away from rural areas and have multiplied in cities. But there are also hundreds of poor children in several villages where there are no schools. Many belong to religious, linguistic, ethnic minorities". In this context, a recent judgment of the Supreme Court did not take educational institutes of minorities into consideration with regards to the "Decree Law on Education of 2009", which establishes compulsory education in the country and reserves 25% of places in public schools for students of poor and disadvantaged classes. The Supreme Court upheld Article 30 of the Indian Constitution, which enshrines freedom of education. "However, the right to establish and administer educational institutes cannot be dissociated from the right of minorities to education. The spirit of the Constitution is that one must take care and ensure access to education for all minorities", explains Fr . Sagayam.
"We, as Christian minorities – he continues - have an educational duty not only towards children belonging to Christian minorities, but also for other weaker sections. The Gospel of Jesus Christ compels us an inescapable commitment to serve the needs of the underprivileged. One cannot think only of high level Christian schools, with sophisticated infrastructure for access to doctorates or MBAs . In addition to these institutes, we need to reconsider our preferential option for serving the poor and marginalized". This is why Fr. Sagayam invites to "strengthen the projects of educational institutions that serve the poor and oppressed, especially in rural areas".
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