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ASIA/HOLY LAND - Even the Catholic Patriarchs of the East welcome the Pope in the Holy Land

Rome (Agenzia Fides) - All the Patriarchs of the Eastern Catholic Churches that have patriarchal exarchates and community of believers in the Holy Land, will welcome Pope Francis during the three-day pilgrimage that will begin on Saturday, May 24 in Amman. This is confirmed by sources of different Patriarchates contacted by Fides Agency.
Already in the capital of the Hashemite Kingdom, the Mass in the stadium will be attended by the Patriarch of Antioch of the Maronites, Bechara Bourtros Rai, Ignace Youssef III Younan, Patriarch of Antioch of the Syrians, Gregorios III, Patriarch of Antioch of the Greek-Melkites, Nerses Bedros XIX Tarmouni, Patriarch of Cilicia of the Armenians and Patriarch of Alexandria of the Copts, Isaac Ibrahim Sidrak and the Patriarch of Babylon of the Chaldeans, Louis Raphael I Sako. All the Patriarchs, except His Beatitude Gregorios III Laham and - most likely – His Beatitude Louis Raphael I Sako, will be present on the various stages of the papal pilgrimage to Bethlehem and Jerusalem.
In past days, what was surprising was Maronite Patriarch Rai's decision to be present in Bethlehem and Jerusalem on the occasion of the visit of Pope Francis. So far no Maronite Patriarch had gone to Jerusalem after the creation of the State of Israel. Criticism regarding Patriarch Rai's choice had been expressed in particular by members of the Shiite party of Hezbollah, that saw in the patriarchal visit a gesture of recognition of a State considered an enemy. The Patriarch responded to criticism pointing out that his visit will be spiritual and not political.
Approximately 10 thousand Maronite Christians live in the Holy Land. After the end of the papal pilgrimage, Patriarch Rai will also travel to Haifa to meet the faithful of the local Maronite community (GV) (Agenzia Fides 23/05/2014)

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