



## **ASIA/IRAQ - Iraqi priest: insurgents are not all "terrorists"**

Mosul (Agenzia Fides) - The situation in Mosul is of "apparent calm". The people have fled mainly because they fear the reaction of the army that could cause carnage among civilians. And the rapid advance of the insurgents cannot be explained only with the intervention from the outside of the jihadists of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), but rather reveals the support they enjoy among large sectors of Iraqi Sunnis opposed to the government of Baghdad. In the report by the Chaldean priest Paolo Thabit Mekko to Fides Agency – who fled from Mosul and is currently a refugee in Kramles, in the Nineveh Plain - the dramatic moment Iraq experiences presents more articulated and complex traits than the summary versions released by the international press. According to what is reported by the Iraqi priest, in Iraq's second city, after the stampede of the army and the police, there have not been attacks and gunfights. Services and the distribution of fuel are guaranteed. The remaining population has been invited to return to work.

"Thanks to their stories - reports Fr. Thabit - it appears that among the groups of armed men, who on Monday evening took control of Mosul, the majority are Iraqis from Mosul or the surrounding areas. They are not all to be labeled as foreign 'terrorists'. Some of them harangue the crowd in the street, say they want to ensure law and order, protect the population and fight against the injustice of the government in Baghdad. With their speeches they especially want to express hostility against the government of al-Maliki. There is also rumor that they have appointed a governor".

Another significant factor is the role carried out by the Kurdish Peshmerga militias, that are gaining positions of power even in areas adjacent to the Iraqi Kurdistan: "Currently, in our area - refers Fr. Thabit - we are 'protected' by Kurdish soldiers who have come from Erbil". The Kurdish Peshmerga control checkpoints on the road from Mosul to Erbil and have also intervened to protect the city of Kirkuk, where there is a strong Kurdish component in the population. "But up until now - added the Chaldean priest - there have not been clashes between Kurds and Sunni militiamen. The latter are heading towards south, they want to capture Baghdad, and the impression is that they do not want to enter in conflict with the Kurds in the regions of the north". As of yesterday, for the first time since the fall of Saddam Hussein, the Kurdish flag was hoisted on institutional and police buildings in the city of Alqosh. "What is worrying - adds Fr. Thabit - are the things that we hear on TV, where there are those who say that we must arm the entire population and send them to fight against terrorists. Now, any wrong choice is likely to cause a bloodbath". (GV) (Agenzia Fides 13/06/2014)