



ASIA/HOLY LAND - The Director of Caritas Jerusalem: there is also a political use of the drug market in the Holy City

Jerusalem (Agenzia Fides) - "The use of drugs is unfortunately becoming an epidemic in East Jerusalem. It affects the Palestinian community in such a devastating manner. 15 thousand young Palestinians use drugs, and 5 thousand are drug addicts. And there is also a political aspect where smuggling in the Arab part of the Holy City is allowed to take place. "The strong complaint about the effects of drug abuse in Jerusalem comes from Father Raed Abusahliah, Director of Caritas Jerusalem. The priest of the Latin Patriarchate raises unanswered questions regarding the inaction of the police forces operating in Jerusalem with respect to drug trafficking concentrated in the part of town inhabited by Arabs: "In these days", notes Father Raed "there are clashes between Palestinian youths and Israeli forces also in Jerusalem. If an Arab boy is arrested for throwing stones, he risks years in prison. But if kilos of heroin on the street are sold, no one does anything. How can one explain this?"

In addition to the complaint, Caritas Jerusalem is active in the field of prevention and fight against drugs with a network of initiatives at various levels. Since 1999, a Center that assists drug addicts with the involvement of families and communities of origin has been active in East Jerusalem. In schools and universities information sessions for students and prevention are organized. In recent years, training courses are being held, aimed at creating professionals - social and health workers, psychologists, nurses - in collaboration with the University of Bethlehem (that recently organized the second conference on the effects of drugs on the local youth) and with the Istqal military Academy University in Jericho, linked to the Palestinian Authority. "This year", says to Fides father Abusahliah "the diplomas of training courses have been recognized by the Palestinian Ministry of Education. We aim to raise their academic level". So far the most serious cases of drug addiction are treated in rehabilitation centers in the Taybeh area or Nazareth. But among the future projects there is the creation of a drug treatment and rehabilitation center in East Jerusalem. "The Islamic Bank" explains the director of Caritas Jerusalem "is considering the possibility of funding the initiative for the first two years".

On 26 June, on the occasion of World Day for fighting drug addiction, 200 students, social workers and NGO representatives marched through the streets of the Old City saying "we want Jerusalem drug-free." The march began at the port of Jaffa, and ended at the Islamic Abna el Quds Community Center.

"That against drugs", adds Father Raed "is a battle that cannot be carried out without the support of our local and international friends". (GV) (Agenzia Fides 04/07/2014)