
Armenia: Msgr. Minassian (Yerevan), “The Pope's words are consolation. We expect a gesture of friendship to the Armenian people from Europe”

“The Pope's words are consolation and encouragement to us. We recognize our vocation as Christians in this land, to bear witness to the Gospel even amidst difficulties. The Church should speak of life, not death, but we are sadly experiencing suffering”. Contacted by SIR in Yerevan, Msgr. Raphaël François Minassian, Archbishop for Catholics of Armenian Rite in Eastern Europe, thus commented on the words delivered yesterday at the Angelus prayer by Pope Francis. Unfortunately, tensions are escalating between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh - frozen in 1994 - was unexpectedly rekindled after the Azerbaijani army attacked Armenian independence positions. “I pray for peace in the Caucasus”, the Pope said at the end of the Angelus prayer. “And I ask the parties in conflict to make concrete gestures of good will and fraternity, which can lead to solving problems not with the use of force and weapons, but through dialogue and negotiation. Let us pray together, in silence, for peace in the Caucasus.” “The cease-fire was due to start last night,” Archbishop Minassian told SIR, “but unfortunately the attacks continued for the entire night and now threaten to amplify the conflict throughout the region.” It is the most severe Armenian-Azerbaijan crisis in recent years, yet marked by repeated incidents even after the 1994 ceasefire agreement mediated by Russia. The number of casualties is still unclear. The Archbishop reported at least 30 deaths, including civilians. The gravity of the crisis is testified by the fact that yesterday morning, a few hours before the Angelus prayer, His Holiness Karekin II, Catholicos of All Armenians, arrived in Rome from Yerevan to be received in Santa Marta by Pope Francis. “His Holiness Karekin - said Msgr. Minassian - informed the Pope on the present situation.” Yesterday, the Catholicos published an appeal on the website of the Armenian Church, also in English, calling for the unity of the Armenian people and inviting all political forces to set aside their controversies for the good of the country and for defence purposes.” Archbishop Minassian echoes the call for unity of all political forces in the country, with a plea to the European Union. “We expect Europe to speak out,” says Msgr. Minassian. “We expect them to bravely stand by the Armenian people and speak the truth, which is that Armenia never launched an attack. We expect a voice of friendship and encouragement, a gesture of fraternity and support to the Armenian people. And to my people I say: you are on the frontline, we are gathered in prayer”. (M.C.B.)

M. Chiara Biagioni