

DEAR BISHOPS OF BUTEMBO-BENI, GOMA AND BUNIA,

DEAR BROTHER AND SISTER RELIGIOUS,

DEAR LAY FAITHFUL OF BUTEMBO-BENI, GOMA AND BUNIA,

cc:

- To the National Bishops' Conference of the DRC (Cenco)
- To the Archbishop of Bukavu
- To the Asuma-Usuma

RE: MESSAGE OF SOLIDARITY OF THE GENERAL COUNCILS TO THE PEOPLES OF THE DIOCESES OF BUTEMBO-BENI, BUNIA AND GOMA

1. Introduction

We, the members of the general councils of various orders and congregations present in the Diocese of Butembo-Beni, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, have been informed of the recent unrest and massacres in the region of the dioceses of Butembo-Beni and in its proximities. We were shocked to learn of the dreadful slaughter of unarmed civilians, even as the people of this region are still mourning the kidnapping of more than 800 individuals, including three Assumptionist priests on October 19, 2012. This word of ours is meant to be an expression of our solidarity with the people of the DRC in general and the Church of Butembo-Beni in particular, and especially to Christ's disciples working tirelessly for peace and for the development of the people in this region.

2. The dignity of the human person finds its source in God and is inalienable.

We denounce and condemn the cruelty and brutality of these killings – of adults and children alike – in the regions of the Diocese of Butembo-Beni. Our initiative arises from our faith. It is a fundamental principle of our faith that every person is created in the image and likeness of God (Gn 1:27). The massacres that have occurred in the region of Mbau, in the diocese of Butembo-Beni strike us by their heinous, inhuman,

and senseless nature; they were not only cold-blooded, but they targeted innocent children, as well as unarmed men and women.

3. The massacres

From October 2014 to this very day, you have had to face horrible massacres. From the information we have received, peace-abiding and unarmed citizens have been abducted and murdered in villages of the territory of Beni. Night-time raids by armed men have resulted in people being kidnapped and others being killed. Pillaging has also taken place: of money, goats, and chicken. The nature of these killings is unbelievable: some had their throats slit; children's arms were gashed; a number of women, even though some were pregnant, were raped and disemboweled; there were cases of entire families being massacred. Victims were killed brutally with machetes, knives, or axes. These killings spread to the Diocese of Bunia in January 2015. Up to the present, more than 400 people have been butchered with the same inhumanity.

4. Consequences of the massacres

These killings have had significant after-effects: food shortages, the interruption or malfunctioning of medical services, displacement of peoples, migrations, lack of psycho-social services, and the suspension of educational services and activities. Family life has been disrupted, if not destroyed. It is unacceptable that the instability of the DRC and killings of this nature persist and that the country continue to be plunged into this spiral of violence. Clearly, the people of the DRC have suffered for too long. They continue to live in insecurity, instability, and poverty, even though their country is blessed with rich natural resources to which only the greedy and the armed have access.

5. Dear Bishops, dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Working in a situation as unstable as the one in your country is not easy. We thank you all, members of the Church and volunteers for your hard work for so many years. We encourage you to continue this ministry of evangelization, which finds its source in an encounter with the saving love of Jesus. Let us keep in mind these words of Pope Francis, «*the Gospel responds to our deepest needs, since we were created for what the Gospel offers us: friendship with Jesus and love of our brothers and sisters* » (EG 265).

The Church must bring its pastoral concern to the victims as well as to the perpetrators of these atrocities. This genocide among brothers must come to an end. But the brutality of these killings reveals the depth of sin in the hearts of its perpetrators and accomplices. The ministry of the Church must reach out to them as well. May you continue to redouble your efforts in the work of forming consciences, of educating the whole person, and of promoting justice, reconciliation, healing and peace. Relying on our own power, that is impossible. We ourselves must encounter Christ if we are to be bearers of the Good News to our brothers and sisters.

6. Dear brother and sister religious,

Do not lose heart! Continue to take part in the human, spiritual, and ethical rebuilding of your country by becoming “experts in communion », witnesses and artisans of this « project of communion » (Apostolic letter of his holiness Pope Francis to all consecrated people, II, 3), encouraging « communion and mutual support « (Ibidem), in becoming: prophets who bear witness to the way that Jesus lived on this earth » (Ibid., II, 2). It is our duty and our privilege to give witness to our people by an example of fraternal love, of solidarity, and of mutual sharing that shows that ethnic differences are a source of strength and goodness and not of division and hatred. We encourage you, dear Major Superiors, to form religious in the areas of justice and peace, of psycho-social services, and of communication for the effective running of your communities and for your apostolic activities.

We are counting on you to inform us every time you deem it necessary by conveying to us objective reports of what is happening.

7. Involvement of the members of the general councils in Rome

As members of our general councils residing here in Rome, we got together and shared our reflections on the situations which you are experiencing. We were deeply moved and affected by what you have had to endure. We recognize how courageous you are in continuing to carry out your ministry among people in such difficult circumstances. We wish to express to you our moral and spiritual support in assuring you of our prayer for all of you.

On our part, we are committed to getting the news out about the deteriorating situation in the DRC and to being in touch with the organs of Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation of the USG-UISG so as to contribute to the effort of making this

ongoing unrest known to the international community and to the different organizations involved in human rights.

8. Keep Hope alive

As St. John Paul II said, « God's redeeming love embraces the whole of humanity, every race, tribe and nation: thus it also embraces all the peoples of Africa » (Ecclesia in Africa 27) and « the Good News is Jesus Christ » (Ibidem 60). We encourage you to rekindle your faith, hope, and love in God and in your brothers and sisters. Raise up your eyes to Christ; he is the source of hope. Moreover, « Before all else, the Gospel invites us to respond to the God of love who saves us, to see God in others and to go forth from ourselves to seek the good of others » (Evangeli Gaudium 39). May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, be with you all and renew your energy and your strength.

Your brothers and sisters in Christ living in Rome,

Augustinians of the Assumption/Assumptionists

Sisters of the Holy Family of Spoleto

Sisters of the Order of the Company of Mary Our Lady

Sisters of Mary Reparatrix

Order of the Holy Cross/Crozier

Missionaries of Africa/White Fathers

Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus

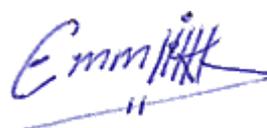
Clerics Regular Minor/Carraciolins

Sylvestrine Benedictines

Order of Carmelites (O. Carm)

Rome, March 29, 2015

On behalf of the General Councils



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