

1. THE STATE OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN DR CONGO



CHILD SOLDIERS

With a surface area of 2,345,000 square kilometers, 4 times the size of France, and 80 times the size of Belgium, the DRC is unfortunately characterised by a poor administration of justice, massive and systematic violations of human rights, and a crumbling economy resulting in poverty, misery, a high unemployment rate, illegal exploitation of its resources and especially armed conflicts of all kinds.

Indeed, out of the 26 provinces in the country, 6 are particularly affected and bruised by the activity of these armed groups. These are the provinces of North Kivu, South Kivu, Maniema, Ituri, Bas-Uélé and Haut-Uélé. According to the Kivu security barometer established by the Congo Study Group (GEC) of New York University and Human Rights Watch, more than 140 armed groups are operating in the eastern DRC. Some of these groups are part of foreign conflicts that have raged in the DRC for several decades, including the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF / Uganda), the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDL / Rwanda), the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA / Uganda and South Sudan) or the National Liberation Forces of Burundi (FNL / Burundi). Among the local groups, some of the most well-known are the Alliance of Patriots for a free and sovereign Congo (APCLS / since 2008) Raia Mutomboki (2005), Mai-Mai Yakutumba (2007), and the Patriotic Resistance Forces of Ituri (FPRPI / 2002).

According to several reports that are in agreement, the factors causing the proliferation of these armed groups are the fragmentation of several key groups through struggles for leadership, the persistence of interethnic conflicts, tensions with neighbouring countries, the political crisis (particularly provoked by the extension of the mandate of the current president, the postponement of elections, the duplication of political parties, the closing of spaces of free expression...) as well as the illicit trafficking of minerals.

Additional factors are the crisis in Kasai (in the Centre) where the conflict resulted in more than 5,000 deaths (2013-2016) and the Bantu / Pygmy conflict in Tanganyika (in the South-East). Thousands of children are recruited and used every year by these armed groups. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the UN Mission in the Congo (MONUSCO), in 2017, violations against children reached alarming proportions, with a total of 3 883 cases of serious violations of the rights of the child, an increase of 66% from 2016. In fact, children were directly targeted, recruited and used as fetishes, soldiers, spies, messengers, human shields, sex slaves, etc.

According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Norwegian Refugee Council, all these armed groups have instigated violence that led in 2016 and 2017 to the largest internal displacement of people in the world, affecting more people than in Syria, Iraq or Yemen. Thus, according to these two sources, besides the tens of thousands of Congolese refugees in Zambia and Angola, and without mentioning the Burundians, Central Africans and South Sudanese who have fled to the DRC, the latter currently has 4 million displaced people, with an increase of 1.7 million in 2018. Moreover, the UN agency, FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization), after an analysis conducted in 2017 in 138 of 145 territories (rural districts), concluded that 11% of the Congolese rural population were experiencing an acute food crisis, an increase of 30% from 2016.

Therefore, according to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), all the signs are pointing to a major humanitarian crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in 2018 and in the years to come: "The situation in the DRC is likely to be ignored as it is set to become the most urgent emergency in 2018" said IOM executive Mohammed Abdiker after a trip to the country whose instability threatens the heart of the continent.

2. WHAT ARE THE DOMINICANS DOING?



THE DOMINICAN FAMILY AND JUSTICE AND PEACE

In the light of the context described above, several members of the Dominican family are involved alongside the most vulnerable and underprivileged with a view to accompanying them both in the promotion of human rights (Dominican Missionaries of the Rosary, Dominicans of Santo Domingo, St Dominic's Parish in Kinshasa) and through civic and electoral education (Civic Education Program – PEDUC - of the University of Uélé). There is also an Observatory for the Exploitation of Natural Resources and Investments in the Uélé Basin (OBERIUELE) set up by the University of Uélé (which is largely managed by members of the Dominican family) in order, not only to accompany the small-scale miners, but also to ensure the social benefits of the exploitation of natural resources by multinationals which are increasingly establishing themselves in the Uélé region.



3. APPEAL TO THE DOMINICAN FAMILY TO CONTRIBUTE TOWARDS A DR CONGO THAT IS RECONCILED AND AT PEACE

To support our brothers and sisters committed to promoting peace in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the members of the Dominican Family are urged to take the following actions:

1. To organise at least one Prayer Vigil and Solemn Eucharist for Peace, Reconciliation and Development in the DR Congo.
2. To incorporate this focus on peace in the DRC into our ordinary Advent preaching and to diffuse this as far as possible through the media of your entity.
3. To invite and encourage all artists within the Order (painters, photographers, poets, musicians, ...) to contribute towards the process of peace and reconciliation at the local and global levels by producing a work of art.
4. To contact the local DR Congo Embassy to inform them about the Dominican Family's focus on solidarity with the struggle for sustainable development and peace in the DRC.
5. To make a financial contribution to PEDUC to support and strengthen the promotion and defence of fundamental rights and freedoms as well as civic and electoral education of the Congolese people.

4. CIVIC EDUCATION PROGRAM (PEDUC)

Directed by a Dominican sister of the *Congrégation des Dominicaines filles de Sainte Catherine de Sienne*, the Civic Education Programme (PEDUC - *Programme d'Education Civique*), with a proven track record of more than a decade, aims to help the people of the Congo to know, promote and defend their fundamental rights and freedoms. Through it, the University of Uélé also wants to contribute to the growth of a democratic spirit and culture as well as to the promotion of positive values that will lead to a conversion of mentalities. And PEDUC has chosen as its motto: "For a population aware of its rights and duties."

DOMINICAN BROTHERS AND SISTERS SUPPORTING MEDIATION PROCESSES



Between 3 and 4 million Congolese people have benefited from projects initiated or led by PEDUC, which is part of a consortium at the national level of observers of the electoral process (known as SYMOCEL; Election Observation Missions).

5. SOME TESTIMONIES ABOUT PEDUC

"At the end of these days of training and evaluation of the post-election situation of 2006, I am very satisfied with the support of PEDUC which enabled us to know our responsibilities and especially our rights. I am very encouraged to see how PEDUC worked and fostered the emergence of enlightened and empowered women's leadership, so that we succeeded in getting a woman from the city of Isiro elected to be a member of the provincial legislature." (JOSE LONYOBUNA, peer educator, Isiro, January 23, 2007).

"I am delighted to see the people of PEDUC come to us especially as we feel a little discriminated and marginalized by others. We do not even know if others see us as human beings. Last week, one of us was almost beaten to death. Had it not been for the intervention of PEDUC, he would still be languishing in the police cell. Please also respect us, especially since we are the first inhabitants of this region". (Frédéric AKPEZILA (Pygmy), Isiro July 26, 2018).

"Since I started following the broadcasts that PEDUC is organising, I feel more and more that the population of the city of Isiro has become very critical, and even more mature. The public discussion platforms that they organise enable the people increasingly to refuse to be deceived by politicians and their supporters. This is why certain speeches and remarks are no longer acceptable in the city of Isiro" (Léon BIGANA, Civil Society Activist and Coordinator of the NGO *Voice of the Oppressed*).

HOW TO SEND CONTRIBUTIONS

Name of Bank: BCD (Code Swift : BCDCCDKI)

Intermediary Bank: Citi Bank New York (Swift : CITIUS33)

Address of Bank: Agence d'Isiro (Province Haut-Uélé)

Account Holder: Université de l'Uélé

Name of Account: UNIUELE/PROJETS

Account Number: 00154-00001331825-61 USD

Works of Art:

Write to the General Curia: Promoter for Justice and Peace

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THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

"A MULTIFACETED COUNTRY ON A LONG ROAD TO PEACE"



Animals in the Virunga Park (North Kivu) March of Christians for Peace

Ravaged by years of war and political instability, the Democratic Republic of Congo is today one of the poorest countries in the world. There is a striking contrast between this poverty and the immense wealth the country possesses. This wealth consists of scarce mineral resources such as coltan, diamonds, gold, copper, cobalt, zinc and manganese, abundant forest resources, diverse animal species such as gorillas and okapis, and vast fertile agricultural lands for crops such as coffee, palm oil and tea.