RE: **DISTRESS CALL** FROM MEMBERS OF GENERAL COUNCILS OF RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES IN THE FACE OF THE BARBARIC MASSACRES TAKING PLACE IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO (DRC), ESPECIALLY IN THE DIOCESE OF BENI-BUTEMBO

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 recent unrest and massacres in the region of the dioceses of Butembo-Beni, Bunia and Goma. We were shocked to learn of the dreadful slaughter of unarmed civilians.

Dear sisters and brothers, we address this message to all men and women of good-will in the name of this suffering people so that you might make your own our cry.

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. We are writing this communiqué in the light of our faith. Each person is created in the image of God (Gn 1:27). The massacres besetting the region of Mbau in the Diocese of Butembo-Beni are clearly a crime against humanity.

3. The context

The Democratic Republic of the Congo has not enjoyed total peace since it obtained its national independence from Belgium on June 30, 1960. As a result of a long history of conflicts, innumerable individuals have been displaced within the country or are simply living elsewhere in exile, while others have paid the cost with their lives. The profound causes of these conflicts are complex; they range from questions related to governance to unjust or murky means of

exploiting the country's rich and abundant economic resources.

Over the past twenty years, the Congolese conflict has drawn in numerous military groups, local and foreign, among which have been the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) and National Army for the Liberation of Uganda (NALU), M23, the FDLR (the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda), and the Maï-Maï. Many of these rebel groups and armed militias are active in the eastern regions of the DRC, resulting in well-documented disasters, carnage, massive displacements of peoples, abductions, rape, and killings bordering on genocide. Among those kidnapped are three religious priests.



Fr. Edmond Bamtupe Kisughu



Fr. Anselme Kakule Wasukundi



Fr. Jean-Pierre

In spite of the appeals made to the United Nations Mission in the DRC (MONUC, later MONUSCO) to assist in the protection of civilian lives, the situation remains critical.

4. Indescribable massacres



Every effort undertaken to bring about peace tends to get contaminated by seeds of division, tension, and struggle. The massacres to which we are reacting at present occurred between October 2014 and March 2015. According to information provided to us, peaceful and unarmed civilians were kidnapped and/or killed in villages in the territory of Beni. Night-time raids by armed men resulted in abductions and murders. Pillaging also took place: of money and cattle. 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.

5. 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. Above and beyond these killings, there is beyond a shadow of a doubt the destruction of the eco-system in this region that is home to the second-largest virgin forest in the world, after that of Amazonia.

6. A distress call to the entire International Community

The situation in the DRC is too complex for us to get embroiled in it. Nevertheless, for God's sake, for the sake of the long suffering of the Congolese people, we appeal in their behalf to the government of the DRC that it give priority to its own people. We urge the Congolese government not to sign any accords unless they allow for the just distribution of economic resources and profit the Congolese people. In a country as rich as the Congo, people will believe in their government only once there is a positive change in people's lives, the development of lasting infrastructure, and the creation of communication networks among people, in a climate where security and freedom are assured. For the sake of the Congolese people who have suffered long enough, we urge the United Nations, the Security Council, and the United Nations Mission in the DRC, to respond to the critical situation of the Congolese people and to assist the government in bringing about a just and lasting peace. In their behalf we appeal to the African Union, to the institutions of the SADC (Southern African Development Community) and COMESA (Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa), to get involved in working for the stability of the Congo, so that this 'sleeping giant' that is the DRC might wake up and contribute to the development and growth not only of the people of the region but of those of the sub-continent and indeed of all of Africa.

Dear brothers and sisters, through you we would like to make appeal to the international community: governments, humanitarian organizations and, to be sure, multinational companies that draw enormous profits from the exploitation of the Congo's resources. Help us to have them support our appeal for a transparent international inquiry into these massacres, so that impunity may not have the last word.

We thank you for the attention that you will afford this letter and for getting the word out about this ongoing unrest.

May Christ the Lord whose Resurrection we are soon to celebrate remain with you and bless you!

The members of the general councils of the following congregations:

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/Croziers

Missionaries of Africa/White Fathers

Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus

Clerics Regular Minor/Carraciolins

Sylvestrine Benedictines

Order of Secular Discalced Carmelites