

Fr. Vincent Machozi (1965-2016)

Fr. Vincent Machozi was murdered this morning (March 21st) in the Congo.

More information:

Un assomptionniste congolais assassiné en RD-Congo
La Croix, le 21/03/2016

RDC: Assassinat du Père assomptionniste Vincent MACHOZI le GADHOP exige une information judiciaire contre les autorités sécuritaires de la zone du crime
GADHOP, Mars 21, 2016

Congolese Assumptionist priest murdered in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
2016-03-21 - R.D. Congo
La Croix, Paris

Founder of an informational website documenting the ongoing violence on North Kivu Province, Fr. Vincent Machozi was murdered in the early hours of Monday, March 21, shortly after he had posted an article denouncing the presidents of the DRC and Rwanda in recent massacres affecting the region.

Fr. Vincent Machozi defended the Yira ethnic group (also known as Nande), who have been victims of the massive and illegal exploitation of coltan in the eastern Congo Could it have been the army of the Democratic Republic of the Congo that murdered Assumptionist priest Vincent Machozi in the early hours this morning, March 21, while he was sleeping at his mother's home some 10 miles from the city of Butembo?

« Soldiers arrived in a vehicle a little after midnight, broke down the door, and shot him on site », according to Very Rev. Emmanuel Kahindo, vicar general of the Assumptionist congregation stationed in Rome, himself a Congolese and from the same tribe as Fr. Machozi.

« Over the past two years he has been threatened and three times barely escaped being killed », added Fr. Kahindo who recalled a conversation they had last October in which he said : « Pray for me because I will be murdered… »

Fr. Machozi oversaw an organization named « Kyaghanda Yira » –from the name of the majority local ethnic group in North Kivu, the Yira or Nande (1) – that aimed at defending the rights and the land of these people.

Since 2010, it is estimated that some four million people have been systematically driven from their ancestral land, terrorized, and massacred by armed groups. One of the main reasons has been the exploitation of coltan, in abundance in this region and a critical element in cell phones and other informational technology. At its general assembly this past February Kyaghanda Yira described these massacres as the « genocide of the Yira people ».

According to Fr. Kahindo, « Fr. Machozi was in the process of proving that Joseph Kabila (president of the DRC since 2001), in tandem with Paul Kagame (president of Rwanda since 2000), was the one behind the massacres that have taken place over the past three years. He was calling for an international inquiry into the illegal exploitation of coltan and the involvement of the Congolese and Rwandan armies in the massacres. »

Born in 1965, one of 13 children (he lost his father at the age of 15), Vincent Machozi decided at age 17 to enter the Assumptionists. After completing his theology studies and being ordained in France, he returned to do seminary work and teach in Kinshasa, the capital city, in 1994. In 2003 he left to undertake doctoral studies at Boston University in the United States in the Department of Theology concentrating on conflict management and the peace process in the African context. He returned in 2010 to put to work what he had learned. He said that he longed to launch a website that would provide the outside world with reliable information about peace ad justice issues in his native land (see www.benilubero.com).

Present in the Congo since 1929, the Assumptionists are especially involved in North Kivu Province. In the Butembo area, where they number more than 170, they run a university, Institut supérieur Emmanuel d'Alzon (with more than 600 students), three secondary schools, numerous elementary schools (with a new one under construction for orphans of war), literacy centers, health facilities, skills training centers, and more.

« For ten years our website has been the memory of the region and its thermometer », Fr. Machozi said this past January on the 10th anniversary of the site.

The site "documented the recent deaths of some 1,155 Yira tribe members" and "denounced the current Rwandan attempts to occupy and balkanize the eastern Congo."

« He wanted to see the truth about what was actually happening on the ground triumph over lies that were being spread, " once again added Fr. Kahindo, and he concluded by saying, "there are others as well working for peace and justice in our seven parishes who are under constant death threats."

Claire Lesegretain

(1) Three Assumptionists kidnapped in October 2012 in the same diocese (Butembo-Beni) whose whereabouts are still unknown were also from the Yira people.

An interview with Vincent Machozi while in the USA.

Interviewer - As an Assumptionist priest from the D.R. Congo, would you share with us some of your family background and how you came to know the Augustinians of the Assumption?

Fr. Machozi - I come from a family of thirteen children, seven of whom are still alive but several of whom died at birth. Because of this, my mother called me Machozi, which means "son of tears." My father died in 1980 when I was fifteen years old. I was encouraged by a sister to continue my education which had begun early in my life at a Baptist school. Those years were followed by two years in a public high school before I attended an Assumptionist high school. The first Assumptionist priest I met from the U.S. was Fr. Ted Fortier, A.A. I spent the next three years guided and mentored by several religious and priests while I discerned a religious or diocesan vocation. At seventeen years of age I became an Assumptionist candidate and visited an Assumptionist community monthly.

- Where did you continue your formation, studies and move on to future assignments?

- In 1984 I was a postulant living in community and later was assigned to teach in a school run by the Oblates of the Assumption. As a professed brother I taught Religion, Chemistry and Mathematics for three years before final vows. Following theological studies in France and after being ordained in Angers, in 1994, I was assigned to Kinshasa, capital of the D.R. Congo, to teach in the seminary, be in charge of the postulants and work with youth. It is important to note that the Assumptionists have been in the Congo since 1929 and educated diocesan seminarians for fifty years before recruiting for the congregation. The effects of the war between 1990-19997 were devastating and divided the capital. Working for peace, reconciliation and advocacy for refugees became a primary concern of the Church in Africa and certainly the Assumptionists, After being assigned superior of the house of formation and continuing to teach in the major seminary, I was named Secretary to Religious Life for five years, '98-'03, in the Office of the Bishop. Later that same year, I came to the United States and continued the mission of advocacy on behalf of my people. I have done this primarily through a website in French which is a network of communication among the peoples of that country.

- Have you been involved in any other ministries while here in Massachusetts?

- I met a Haitian woman who was attending Mass at the Assumptionist Center in Brighton, the result of which led me to Immaculate Conception Parish in Everett, MA where I worked with that community as a French speaking priest. I was extensively involved for a time but now have cut back to one Mass a week and attend major events only. This is principally because I am now a doctoral student in theology at Boston University with one more year to go before graduation.

- What is your vision and hope for the future of your country, for the congregation and as an Assumptionist priest?

- I would like to continue teaching part time and work on social and economic issues affecting the grassroots transformation of society when I return to my country. I would also like to work in a village, training catechists and helping the poor to make a living. I want to bring the story of the Congo to the world through the continued development of the website and most importantly, I would like to see the vision of Fr. d'Alzon continue to grow by focusing on the issues of today, especially poverty. The hope of the future truly lies in the youth of today. Please check my website at www.benilubero.com