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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 and 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 Lesegetain

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