

On the night of October 18-19 our three Assumptionist brothers, BAMTUPE KISUGHU Edmond, MUMBERE NDULANI Jean-Pierre and KAKULE WASUKUNDI Anselme, were kidnapped from the rectory of Our Lady of the Poor parish in Mbau, diocese of Butembo-Beni, North Kivu Province in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Since this terrible no reliable news has been gatheed about their whereabouts. About 800 other civilians, among them men, women, children and even infants, have been kidnapped the same way in the same region, particularly in the Catholic parishes of Oicha, Erigneti, Mbau, Buisegha, and Beni-Paida. As of last night the Catholic parish of Maboya has joined this sad list with the kidnapping of Mr. MUTSUNGA Augustin, a medical doctor.

And from the day of our brothers' kidnapping, the Church and all the people of the region have been undergoing a nightmare. In fact, almost every other day, people are kidnapped, especially in Mbau, Oïcha, Eringeti, Buisegha, Beni-Paida parishes and sometimes in Mutwanga. This year has become the most painful for the Augustinians of the Assumption, the Christian community of Mbau, and the members of the families of the victims.

At the present, the anguish is so much more profound since the fate of all these victims remains unknown. Investigations that have been undertaken so far, aiming at obtaining at least some information from and about them, have been unsuccessful. Government institutions, public organizations, national and international NGO's operating in the region, have all been contacted in order to enlist their cooperation in the liberation of the three priests and all the faithful in captivity, but all these efforts have been fruitless. It seems that they are being held in an inaccessible zone, into which even the national army dares not penetrate.

There are rumours, however, that circulate in our towns according to which all the victims are in captivity either in Virunga National Park (Mbau-Kamango axis), or in Ruwenzori mountains near Kikingi – Kikura (in Watalinga area), or in the region between Kainama and Boga on the border between North Kivu Province and the Oriental Province. But these are rumours, none of which has been verified because of the inaccessibility of most of these areas.

The current situation in this part of North Kivu province appears to substantiate the claim that small states have been constituted within the country. In fact, there is evidence of an ever-growing number of militias in these remote areas with ill-defined agendas. The victims are ordinary citizens who have no political or geopolitical ambition. The misery of the local population has been exacerbated because they can no longer work their farms, even those nearest to the main road, for fear of being kidnapped. The Democratic Republic of the Congo

army remains largely passive, with little activity that might encourage hope among the local people. Is this a sign of incapacity or complicity? No one but God alone knows the answer.

Meanwhile, bands of outlaws have been organised to make money from the families of those kidnapped. Some people pretend to be mediators capable of contributing to the liberation of the captives. In fear of being betrayed, these crooks threaten their interlocutors with murder or abduction themselves in case they disclose this contact. The behaviour of these lawless groups constitutes a real plague that creates additional fear and trauma and has left the families of the kidnapped poorer and more miserable than before. It is in this context that the Church and the entire population of this part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo have been living.

In this distress, the Assumptionist Fathers request the contribution of everyone for the liberation of their confreres Edmond, Jean-Pierre, and Anselme, and of all persons in captivity. This anguished call is mainly addressed to the Congolese government, the national army of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to UN mission for the stability of the Congo (MONUSCO) and, of course, to any person or group capable of contributing to the well-being of our people.

The Assumptionist Fathers ask the kidnappers to consider the tears of a so large number of people, their brothers and sisters, pleading before them for peace. Bring back to us our priests, parents, brothers and sisters, children,... Listen to the interior voice of your conscience and follow it for it reminds you of the universal brotherhood due to the humanity that all men and women share. Please listen to our plea for the liberation of all the kidnapped of the North-Kivu province.