



2016-12-18 - DR-Congo

by Marie Malzac, Dec. 18, 2016

Four questions posed to Fr. Emmanuel Kahindo, vicar general of the Augustinians of the Assumption

La Croix: What is the political situation in the DR-Congo at the moment?

Fr. Emmanuel Kahindo: The second term of President Joseph Kabila officially ends on December 19 and the Constitution forbids him from seeking a third. From that date forward he

will be, in the eyes of the opposition illegally exercising power. Although this deadline is fast approaching, the parties concerned are far from reaching any agreement, especially on the role Kabila should play: should make way for a transitional president or stay in place until elections can be held?

Dialogue, under the auspices of the Congolese bishops, was unsuccessful and therefore suspended. The country is holding its breath and no one knows what is going to happen. On the eve of the deadline the capital, Kinshasa, as well as the eastern region of the country, has seen a huge influx of soldiers in order to prevent clashes. At midnight, all of the country's social media networks will be cut in order to stifle any communication among the opposition but also so that the outside world will not be witness to what is happening in the country. Nevertheless, it seems that 80% of the population is ready to be fired upon as a sign of their demand that the president leave. People are ready for anything and everything.

Why did the bishops announce a suspension of the dialogue two days before the deadline and their departure to meet with the Pope in Rome?

Fr. Emmanuel Kahindo: Acknowledging failure in the current explosive situation was not an option. The bishops must play the role of firemen, that is to say, finding ways to calm matters so that a real inferno doesn't break out. That is why Most Rev. Nicolas Djomo, chair of the national bishops' conference of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Cenco), announced on Saturday, December 17, that the dialogue had been suspended.

Accompanied by the conference's vice-president, he took off that evening for Rome. The two bishops are scheduled to remain there until Wednesday, December 21, when discussions are scheduled to begin anew. During their stay, they are supposed to meet with Pope Francis, hoping that this visit might have some impact on the political situation in the country and that they might return with a strong message of support. At his Angelus message on Sunday, December 18, the Pope once again renewed his call for a peaceful dialogue and the avoidance of all violence.

What is the Church's involvement in promoting dialogue in the DR-Congo?

Fr. Emmanuel Kahindo: Last August 15, Pope Francis strongly denounced the « shameful

silence » of the international community in the wake of the newly perpetrated massacre the previous night in Béni, in the eastern region of the country. Since then he has been closely following the situation and it seems to me that he has explicitly encouraged the Congolese bishops to play the role of mediators in this national dialogue, what they had already begun to do long before, especially in proposing an electoral calendar .

At the level of the Holy See, important diplomatic measures have been undertaken to request that Western countries raise their voices in a united fashion to demand a solution in the DR-Congo. In September, Joseph Kabila was received at the Vatican. Beyond any shadow of a doubt the Pope demanded that he respect the Constitution.

In October, the bishops nevertheless, by way of protest, withdrew from the national dialogue in the wake of the massacres perpetrated in Kinshasa on September 19, before re-opening the discussion only in the month of November, at Joseph Kabila's request and with a green light from the opposition.

Why is the Church the only organism capable of assuring mediation?

Fr. Emmanuel Kahindo: In the DR-Congo, the Church is the last bastion of the population, 50% of which is Catholic and the last institution in which the Congolese trust. Historically it has always been at the front-line defending human rights, especially in the person of Cardinal Laurent Mosengwo, archbishop of Kinshasa.