

Novena to the Prince of Peace

from 16 to 24 DECEMBER 2012

for peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

On the initiative of the Pontifical Foundation Aid to the Church in Need we invite you to join us in the novena of prayer to the Prince of Peace from 16 to 24 December 2012, to beseech Him to bring about His peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

We are sending this novena to all the contemplative communities in Europe and Africa, Asia and Latin America, to our benefactors in 17 countries, to men of good will, to all the media who desire to pass on this entreaty.

“If these were silent, the stones would immediately cry out.” (Luke, 19,40)

The Democratic Republic of the Congo cries out in distress. Slaughter, burning, pillaging, the systematic abuse of women, rape, impoverishment, hostage-taking, internal displacement of entire populations ... have become the daily lot of people in the east of the country.

Since May 2012 the attacks by rebel movement M23 have caused widespread suffering in the region. The rebel troops recently invaded Goma, the capital of North Kivu.

In a Mass on 29th October marking the anniversary of the assassination of Archbishop Christophe Munzihirwa of Bukavu in 1996, his successor, Archbishop François-Xavier Maroy, said in his homily: “The evil ones have brought the war here to us and this war continues to cause us suffering. They have brought division and this still gnaws away at us to the present day. They have brought wickedness here to us and that continues to gnaw at our society to the present day.” And he continued: “We are called upon to say to others who come here that we have role models, people who have died while fighting for peace, truth, unity and reconciliation between peoples of the Congolese nation.” He asked that we listen to the voice of three of his predecessors who died because of the war, the messages of Mgr Munzihirwa, Mgr Kataliko and Mgr Charles: “Let us work to ensure that peace comes to where we are, let us build peace.” Fearlessly, Mgr Maroy insisted: “Go and say to those who love war that happiness cannot come out of the barrel of a gun. Ask them to abandon the tensions they are nurturing between peoples.” And he concluded his homily by inviting us to pray: “We are still under threat and we ask of those who are with God to intercede with Him for us, that their

intercessions may soon bring us good fruit. The fruit that we most long for is the safeguarding of our unity, the unity of the Congolese nation.”

The Church believes in peace and it prays for peace. At this time when the East of the Democratic Republic of Congo is prey to armed conflicts, we call in this novena to the Prince of Peace to plead with him to stop this hideous war and finally to enable us to build a pacified, unified and prosperous country. With confidence we address our prayer to the Lord so that there may flourish in the minds of people the inviolable respect for every human person and a firm condemnation of the war and violence which is currently raging on the territory of the Congo.

“Pray, pray, pray, I ask you, cry out, unite your prayer with ours ...” That is the great cry of alarm and distress that the Bishop Théophile Kaboy of Goma sends out. **“To you dear monks and nuns and to every person touched by God in the life of contemplation on this earth of man, in my capacity as Pastor, Bishop of the Diocese of Goma, I send an SOS of despair, let us fast, let us implore, let us beseech. At Goma we still have sufficient faith to receive the reproach of the Master: ‘Why are ye so fearful? How is it that ye have no faith?’ (Mark 4, 40). I thank you with all my heart, Alleluia.”**

Let us pray

“And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive” (Matthew 21, 22)

You who are the Prince of Peace, of true Peace, help us to understand that the only way to build is to flee from evil and follow what is good, tirelessly and courageously.



The intentions for each day of the novena are as follows:

First day:

“It is 20 years since the Democratic Republic of the Congo became a place of evils of all kinds.”

We pray to you:

For the peace and unity of the country, that all the inhabitants of the Democratic Republic of the Congo may work together to build a nation. That after so many years and so many horrors they are not discouraged and that they maintain the hope for a better future.

Structured armed conflicts have recently been observed in North and South Kivu, called by various names.

These hostilities involve massive displacements of population within the country. These realities are accompanied by an unprecedented increase in armed crime, with roads, rivers and lakes being cut off so that dire poverty sets in.

Thousands of Congolese are fleeing from the armed conflicts. Hundreds of thousands have died in them. Yet others will die as a result of the indifference of the international community.

The situation of the civil population is desperate and threatens to worsen further if the conflicts continue.

Behind all these attempts at destabilisation is the appropriation of the resources in the East of the Congo.

LET US PRAY FOR THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

PRAYER FOR PEACE, UNITY AND TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY

Lord, Eternal Father,
Creator of heaven and earth.

In Your love

You have entrusted to us this land of the Congo.

We pray to You for peace in our country

And for the cessation of war.

Look upon our tears shed for the millions who have died.

Look upon our hearts bleeding for the many families who have been devastated and destroyed.

Look especially upon the suffering of our brothers and sisters.

In the east of the country, victims of this terrible war.

Do not permit the Congo, this blessed gift, bequeathed to us by our forebears, to be divided.

Touch the hearts of those who sow death and distress,

Enlighten our governments so that they may work to maintain

The unity of the Congolese people and the integrity of their territory

Strengthen and protect those who are weighed down by suffering.

Consolidate the peace in our hearts and between us.

Strengthen the faith and determination of the Congolese people

In building up a pacified, unified and prosperous Congo.

In union with the Virgin Mary, Our Lady of Peace,

We beseech You, in the name of Jesus Christ,

Prince of Peace, who lives and reigns with You in the unity of the Holy Spirit

For ever and ever

AMEN.

Second day:

“The Democratic Republic of the Congo is beset by a succession of wars of unimaginable horror.”

We pray to you:

For an end to violence and all armed combat. That the guns may fall silent and that each person's right to life may be respected and defended.

The wars also feed on the source of a breakdown of society. The civil population is confronted by an unprecedented level of armed violence because of the renewed militancy of the armed groups in the Kivu regions. 300,000 people were displaced within a few months, thousands died.

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Third day:

“The culture of death has established itself in a terrible way: it mows down and ruins the future of a whole generation of young people and children who are recruited by force into all kinds of militia.”

We pray to You:

For young people and children, the country's future. We pray for those who have been robbed of their childhood, liberty and innocence by being forced to become instruments of war, violence and power.

Since 1996, thousands of children have been recruited to the army and militias of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, voluntarily or by force. The children are taken off the streets or called out of their classrooms, and they are snatched from their families in the displacement camps. To force them to obey and to act without emotion they are given drugs or alcohol. Some of them have had to kill members of their own family, while others were forced to commit acts of sexual abuse or commit acts of cannibalism on the corpses of their enemies killed in combat.

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Fourth day:

“Just about everywhere there are camps of displaced people waiting for manna from the non-governmental organisations (NGOs), while the whole country is covered with fertile regions where a hard-working population should have no trouble feeding itself.”

We pray to You:

For all those who have had to abandon their families, houses, land and goods. For all those who hunger, for those displaced and for all those who have no roof over their heads in this cold, rainy season.

Mgr François-Xavier Maroy warned us: “They’ve sown insecurity in our villages. It’s no longer possible to cultivate the land, it’s not possible to breed cattle, it’s not possible to work. People are fleeing the villages for Bukavu, a town which has become filthy because of the famine which prevails everywhere. The famine makes us suffer and it has already claimed many victims. Anyone who stops you growing crops, stops you planting and stops you reaping the harvest also wishes to starve you to death.”

In the urban environment the situation is also completely hellish: armed robberies, abductions, base murders, throwing of grenades ...

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is very rich in natural resources but the civilian population derives little or no benefit from them. At the same time agriculture here has the greatest potential for helping to reduce poverty. The potential for growth in this sector is very great, especially if the thousands of abandoned farms were to be restored.

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Fifth day:

“In the health domain, in addition to the numerous epidemics and diseases due primarily to the lack of hygiene, HIV/AIDS and malaria are raging throughout the displacement camps. These lack everything. Infant mortality is very high, and the aged die abandoned by all.”

We pray to You:

For the sick, the disabled, the dying, who are the impotent victims of war and violence. That God may give them comfort and hope.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo in general, and in particular the East of the country, is seriously impacted by wars whose consequences are

devastating for the population, especially in the health domain. These years of warfare have weakened the country's health system. The displaced persons often live in deplorable hygienic conditions.

In a context dominated by conflict, children are the first victims. Access to healthcare in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is very poor and infant and maternal mortality is one of the highest in the world.

Malnourished children who are just skin and bone give the distressing impression of being living skeletons. These small, fragile children, with large bellies, emaciated arms and shoulders, seem to tremble in a skin that is too big for them.

Malaria, respiratory infections and acute diarrhoea are the principal causes of infant mortality.

The problem of HIV/AIDS is aggravated by a number of risk factors, which include promiscuity, sexual violence, sexual exploitation as a source of income and the armed groups.

Other diseases pose a grave threat including the plague and Ebola haemorrhagic. Non-transmissible diseases are also on the increase: diabetes, systemic arterial hypertension, cancers or neglected diseases such as sickle cell anaemia.



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Sixth day:

“Rape and sexual harassment have become a leisure sport and an arm of warfare.”

We pray to You:

For all the women who have been ruined and deprived of their dignity and honour. You created them as pillars of society, and gave them the ability to passing on the gift of life. Today they are being humiliated, subjugated and annihilated.

The young, the military, the police and the militia rape women, young girls, even children. This is a frightening phenomenon and continues despite a law introduced in July 2006 to counter acts of sexual violence.

Most of the abducted young girls in the camps are obliged to become the “wives” of the military commanders. They are relegated to the role of sex slaves. To add to their distress, they know that they will then be stigmatised if they return to their communities, since they will have been raped and will have had children by members of a rival group.

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Seventh day:

“More and more threats weigh heavily on life and on the family”.

We pray to You:

For the family, the basic cell of our society and the pivotal point of the our country's future. That families may live united and in harmony, that parents respect one another, that the right of children to be born be respected.

On 29th October 2012, Archbishop François-Xavier Maroy of Bukavu said: “Why did they take up arms to kill their brothers? You must be mad to obey someone who tells you to shoot your father, your mother or your aunt. If you are intelligent you will say to those who demand this that arms do not bring happiness and then you will part in peace. If you accept that you must take up a gun and kill your brothers and sisters, this shows you are not united. Let us make no mistake, let us show them that we want to build unity so that our nation will become a family. Let us leave aside all things that destroy the life of human beings. Let us come together and look for that which can help us to live and work together in peace". But this goal will not be achieved if our mothers continue to be threatened. "What reason do these people have to threaten mothers? The mother is the one who gives birth. Her womb is like that of the Virgin Mary, like that of Elizabeth, who gives birth to the one who announces the sanctity of the world. If they commit all these violent acts against her it is not merely to prevent her from further giving birth, but to kill her so that there will not be any descendants.” But even in the worst of scenarios “we will always be there, we will continue to give birth to children and to build our nation.”

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Eighth day:

“In the face of this dramatic situation and with the state and the public authorities absent, only the Church and a number of confessional groups are endeavouring to stem this avalanche of evils.”

We pray to You:

For the Church, the Bishops, the Priests, the monks and nuns and committed lay persons: that God may give them strength and courage in their dedication to truth, peace and reconciliation of the country.

This accumulation of dramatic events leads one to think that the state hardly exists, or at any rate is failing to fulfil as it should its sovereign duty to protect all citizens, without discrimination, assuring them legitimate security, peace and prosperity.

The country is continuing to function in part as a kind of reservation, a no man's land, a jungle where whole regions have been abandoned to interest groups, to the detriment of the population who have to date suffered too much from the state's insufficiency, or at least from its manifest weakness.

The Congolese Episcopate has sent very strong messages to Christians and men of good will, denouncing the principal causes of the absence of peace and inviting them to respect human rights.

Such is the situation which prevails in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and which has prompted the Church to commit itself in a prophetic manner to the service of the common good, of reconciliation, of justice and peace in accordance with the Gospel and social doctrine.

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Ninth day:

“For years there has been an endless procession of meetings, conferences, colloquia and summits at which minds have endeavoured in vain to dislodge the devils who have taken up residence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and transformed it into ‘a cemetery people who just scrape by’. The stench of death is constantly present.”

We pray to You:

That politicians in the country and throughout the world may decide to seek peace and the good of the country, that they may stop only thinking of their own interests and enrichment. That those rare individuals who raise their voice against corruption and injustice do not tire of doing so despite the threats and indifference.

MONUSCO (United Nations Organization Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo) has had a presence in Goma for very many years and more extensively in the East of the country. Its ineffectual presence (the protection of people in danger is not part of its mandate) is profoundly questioned by the local population. The conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is the most deadly since the Second World War. We must put an end to this deafening silence on the part of the international community and remind the world’s leaders that millions of lives have already been lost.

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We invite you to distribute it widely, in the conviction that the Lord
will hear our cry of distress. Let us implore the Lord with fervour and
infinite confidence.

In the profound communion of prayer:
Aid to the Church in Need
www.acn-intl.org