

## **08 Peace and Reconciliation in the DR Congo**

In this lung of the world that is the African periphery, the Claretians form a community eager to announce peace. The democratic Congo, the Congo we dream of, is a country-continent, a land replete with goods and a people who urgently need to recover the peace torn from their hands. As missionaries here, we renew our dream and commitment to proclaim peace.

Our proclamation is rooted in Jesus, who, being a peacemaker, gives peace without imposing doctrines or violating cultures; instead, he becomes a neighbor to the least. That is why we light the Word under the tree invoking the ancestors. And we go to the hospital to share the same meal as our brothers. Sometimes our hands, in solidarity with a people that is mostly peasant, share with them the same sowing and return full of dreams made of corn, cassava, and peanuts. And this is also a proclamation of peace.

At other times, an anguished voice knocks on our door late at night. A woman tells us that the police arrived, burst violently into the house, and, without saying why, whisked two of her children away. To proclaim peace amid a simple peasantry is to denounce arbitrary detentions and promote defending one's rights. This is why we accompany the victims of police and military extortion so that they are released and organize training on human rights and fundamental freedoms.

This proclamation of peace also carries a dream of reconciliation. There is no shortage of occasions when neighboring families turn domestic problems into public ones. Unfortunately, if the case goes to the police station, they will likely lose what little they have: some livestock or part of the harvest. That is why the Justice and Peace Commissions in our communities take very seriously the evangelical proposal of settling conflicts in the community so as not to go to court. But this reconciliation proposal also has a broader horizon.

When Pope Francis visited us (in the first days of February 2023), he did so under the motto: "All reconciled in Christ." A simple phrase but capable of quenching the deep thirst of these people. The violence in the Great Lakes Region has been going on for a long time, and the colonial drawing of borders and the systematic extraction and plundering of minerals have only increased it. Massacres are repeated every week, along with the rape of women as a weapon of war and other similar atrocities.

The challenge of proclaiming peace in this context is immense. Still, we want our missionary solidarity to place us more and more in a state of "going forth" and our mercy

to become effective like that of the Good Samaritan. Our communities are still far from the refugee camps and devastated villages. But we have begun to participate in the demonstrations calling for peace and respect for the territorial integrity of our homeland. It is only a first step towards ever more concrete proximity to our suffering brothers and sisters.

Indeed, this proclamation cannot be improvised; it requires to be prepared, as our brothers in Barbastro were. That is why, today, as yesterday, our mission remains to form a heart without fear. Ultimately, the poor Congolese teach us the true meaning of nonviolence and how God wants to fill us with consolation. So, sister and brother who listen to us, we need you to feel that this is also your people, that in the Congo, you also have your family, and that peace cannot be fragmented because only one peace is lasting: the one we all seek together.