

Goodnight, the Provincial of AFC **“AFC Province: yesterday, today and tomorrow”**

The Central Africa Province (AFC) now in its second century of Salesian presence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC): yesterday, today, tomorrow.

Good evening, dear confreres! I would like to speak to you about the Assumption Province of Central Africa in the DRC. As the title already indicates, Central Africa has by now entered its second century of Salesian presence in DRC.

GEOGRAPHY: I would first like to situate our province in geographical terms: DRC (not to be confused with the nearby country of Congo-Brazzaville) is a country the size of a continent, its surface area covering 2,345,410 km², with a total population (2013) of 75,507,308 people which is still increasing (4-5 children on average per family). The need for schooling is enormous. Given the part of the country (rural part) has been abandoned, undeveloped and unsafe, there is a constant exodus to the cities: Lubumbashi, which was earlier a million people, now has two million; and Kinshasa has become a megalopolis with 7-8 million inhabitants without the appropriate infrastructure for such increase.

LANGUAGES: French is the official language used for public administration and in schools, and partly the *lingua franca* in the cities. Consider that in 2050, Africa held 85% of the world's French-speakers, and a good number of those live in the DRC. The four most common languages spoken (known as “national languages”) in the DRC are: Lingala (especially in the west, Kinshasa), Kiswahili (spoken in the south and east, especially in Lubumbashi and Goma-Uvira), Tshiluba, spoken in the two Kasai provinces in the centre of the country, and finally Kikongo in a small area. Other than these four languages there are some 200 -400 local languages spoken in rural areas and this shows us that DRC is one of the most multilingual countries in Africa.

ECONOMY: largely agricultural (70% of the working population) in the country areas, but rapidly evolving towards an industrialised economy. Just the same there are no ‘transforming’ industries. The economy is “extroverted”, that is, more geared to export of primary materials. A Belgian geologist, Jules Cornet, invented the expression still used today: “The Congo is a geological scandal”; its subsoil is being regurgitated for every kind of mineral. So we can understand that this country is a strong “ambit” of interest for major powers, which includes new or emerging ones like China, Japan, India, Korea etc. Minerals are this country's greatest riches, but there are also huge possibilities for electricity (the Inga Hydroelectric plant) and oil; the Congo (along with Brazil) having the largest forested area on the planet. So it is the second “lung” producing the oxygen needed for human existence on planet earth. So the Congo occupies a geopolitically strategic place in the world.

SOCIAL SCENE: though there are evident signs of economic growth in all sectors, the country still remains a work in progress in terms of a more solid basis than the one there is currently. Bad resource management shows up in a lack of solidarity and contributive and distributive justice. This leads to huge lack of equality amongst the population (the gap between rich and poor is forever getting wider); hence the wars, fermented by paid mercenaries (paid by magnates); never-ending revolutions because they are all based on hoarding mineral wealth which has been exploited illegally. There is a need for a new system of transparent management under popular control in a truly democratic political system with a responsible government which can put an end to corruption and can defend

its territory; there is also need for a neutral international community to help the DRC put an end to everything that does not help its development.

A. **YESTERDAY**

The first Salesian presence goes back to the colonial era of the Belgian Congo when various Congregations were involved in evangelisation of the country (end of 19th century to beginning 20th) and this was true for the school sector in collaboration with the colonial government. It was then that in 1911, the Salesians from Belgium came to the Congo with a twofold purpose; schooling for white and black youth; getting involved in the scholastic sector. In 1925, Propaganda Fide assigned the far southern area in the Katanga province (the Katanga boot), to the Salesians. Salesian efforts up until 1952, were focused on planting the Church in this rural region where they needed to build mission stations, set up primary schools and clinics. After 1952, the Salesians (under the aegis of the Belgian Provincial, Fr René-Marie Picron) dedicated themselves more to youth in the industrial cities springing up in Katanga as a result of the mining industry. In 1959 the time was ripe to create a Province, the first Province in Africa with 150 Salesians and 19 communities.. Most were European missionaries with only two or three Congolese confreres. Africanisation did not grow until around 1980. from then on there was a gradual increase in the number of vocations and in 1990 it was an Africanised province with 85% of its personnel African (2013) always with the support of a group of missionaries (15%).

B. **TODAY**

PERSONNEL: The Province has 233 confreres, 14 novices, 47 postnovices (3 years of study recognised by Congo as a Diploma), 15 practical trainees, 25 studying theology, 15 confreres doing university studies. More than half of the confreres in the Province are in formation. The average age is 41. We could also note that AFC has already given a number of confreres to the Missions Department. We have 15 missionaries: 2 in Asia, 2 in Latin America, 2 in Europe, the rest in various Provinces in Africa.

WORKS: in AFC we have 27 communities (canonical + non-canonical) with a wide variety of works connected to them (around fifty) since each community manages more than one work. If we divide the works into five groups we could say that the largest group is schools of every kind: primary, secondary (give colleges and three secondary technical schools and two higher teaching centres set up recently (university level: ESIS (computer science school) and ECOPO (tertiary level economics and politics). Another group is works for young people at risk with boarding sections, agricultural, trade schools attached. Another group is parishes and mission stations and their various outstations. Yet another group is a cultural and pastoral centre (for youngsters) called "Safina", and a communications centre called "La Colombe" and we are about to launch our first radio station, Radio Don Bosco. Finally, the last group of works are our formation communities: prenovitiate, novitiate and postnovitiate all in the same place, and the Theologicum which is an interprovincial theological centre, under the direction of a curatorium made up of several provinces and vice provinces: AFC, Mozambique, Angola and Madagascar: French or Portuguese-speaking countries. We hope that this institute, which has a stable professorial staff and a good library, can be still better supported by other provinces in terms of academic and formation personnel... We are already building accommodation for them. This institute celebrated its 25 anniversary in 2013.

EVENTS: Our animation and government plan accompanies communities and each confrere under a theme which takes its inspiration from the Rector Major's Strenna and other topics offered for the Bicentenary of Don Bosco's birth. Our six year programme is

called "Source et Fontaine" to help each confrere to go to our Christian and Salesian sources.

We celebrated our centenary of Salesian presence in DRC in 2011.

We had the Don Bosco Casket come through as a sign of spiritual renewal for the entire Salesian Family.

We started a new Delegation called DRC-West on 24 January 2013 which includes the houses at Kinshasa and the two Kasai houses (west and centre of the country).

We had our 18th Provincial Chapter in preparation for GC27.

c. **TOMORROW**

Given the large number of confreres in formation, we hope for continued growth of Salesian work in DRC, which will allow us (or so we hope) to have three Provinces: Lubumbashi (south) – Kinshasa, with western and eastern Kasai (west and centre of the country) – North – and South (the east, near Rwanda and Burundi). This is our Salesian map for the future and also our dream.

Realisation of this dream depends on three factors: continual flow of new vocations, working together for formation, good leadership in communities.

AFC accepts many vocations each year. It is truly a very positive sign for the future of this country and also for the Congregation. Formation is a decisive factor for the Province's future. We have all stages of formation and we need to work on accepting candidates, serious discernment, accompaniment, solid and authentic formation of the young and of formators. As for animation and leadership of communities, this is made visible in accompanying Rectors and others in charge of communities (and Salesian presences). We are optimistic regarding consolidation of communities and also an intelligent and dynamic expansion of the Salesian presence in AFC.

Long live Don Bosco!

Long live AFC!

Good night

Fr Jean-Claude NGOY, sdb

Provincial