



AFRICA/UGANDA - Ugandan Bishops' Conference President launches appeal to help rebuild north: "millions of people have been living for 20 years in refugee camps"

Rome (Agenzia Fides) – "The Church in Uganda is growing, as evidenced by the many priestly and religious vocations" Fides was told by Archbishop Matthias Ssekamanya of Lugazi, President of the Uganda Bishops' Conference, in Rome for their ad Limina Apostolorum visit.

"While we place great hopes on the growth of the Church in our country, we cannot hide the fact that we are facing some major challenges," said Archbishop Ssekamanya. "First, not all the faithful have completely assimilated the Gospel. This is because the traditional cultures are still very strong. Some of these are incompatible with the Gospel, such as polygamy and certain ancestral religious beliefs."

"Other challenges include the sects, which have significant financial resources and have a strong appeal to young people and people living in modest conditions. We do not know where all this money comes from, but we know that these sects have large quantities available to them. We also know that most of the sects present in Uganda come from North America and Europe."

With regard to ecumenical and interfaith relations, the President of the Bishops' Conference of Uganda states that "in Uganda, we have an interreligious Commission in which we join other religions in addressing some common problems. There is also a World Council, which includes the Catholic, Orthodox, and Anglican churches. Among the issues address are: education, intermarrying, and social problems, especially peace in justice. In this regard, we are preparing a common pastoral letter on the next elections (to be held in 2011).

We asked Archbishop Ssekamanya about the situation in northern Uganda, for over 20 years devastated by the war led by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) against the civilian population. "The situation is in the process of continuous improvement, as there is no more fighting," says Archbishop Ssekamanya. The LRA (which Archbishop Ssekamanya calls a "very mysterious group"), in recent years, has shifted its activities to outside Uganda, particularly in southern Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Central Africa.

"The biggest problem is the fact that we have millions of people who have been living 20 years in refugee camps. We need assistance to rebuild homes and to allow people to resume farming. These people are very poor and in need of everything. I would stress the urgent need to rebuild the schools, because education is the key to any type of development."

"The Catholic Church will continue to do its part to bring about a complete reconciliation in the area," concluded the President of the Bishops' Conference. (L.M.) (Agenzia Fides 2/3/2010)