



## **AFRICA/CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC - Violence of Ugandan LRA guerrillas: Bishop of Bangassou tells Fides his experience**

Rome (Agenzia Fides) – “The LRA rebels have caused serious damage but it is mainly the psychological and human losses that sadden me most,” Fides was told by Bishop Juan Jose Aguirre Munos, Bishop of Bangassou, whose diocese includes the mission of Rafa in the southeastern part of the Central African Republic, recently attacked by Ugandan rebels of the Lord's Liberation Army (LRA, see Fides 22/2/2010).

“The rebels raided the Catholic mission completely and only the intervention of a department of the army prevented two French collaborators from being kidnapped,” says Bishop Aguirre Munos. “The two workers, a man and a woman, taught in a high school run by the Franciscan Sisters of Montpellier. They taught mathematics and French, respectively. In these areas, the Church runs schools of all levels, from elementary schools to high schools. In Bangassou, we also have a technical school for street children and single mothers,” says Bishop Aguirre Munos.

The presence of LRA fighters constitutes a serious threat to local populations and to the life of the mission in the diocese. Bishop Aguirre Munos explained how it was possible that a guerrilla group active in northern Uganda for years, has come to threaten the southeastern Central African Republic, which has no common border with Uganda.

“For several years the LRA has shifted from northern Uganda and settled first in Juba, southern Sudan and then near Isiro in the Garamba Forest, in the north-eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo,” says the Bishop of Bangassou. “Here, Ugandan rebels had established their headquarters, well equipped with several runways for landing small planes carrying supplies. No one knows whose planes they are, nor where they come from. In December 2008, the armies of Uganda, Southern Sudan and DRC attacked the LRA headquarters in the Garamba Forest. However, the LRA leader, Joseph Kony, along with many of the guerrillas managed to escape.”

“The military operation of 2008 has had two consequences,” said Bishop Aguirre. First of all, the guerrillas have retaliated on the Congolese civilian population, performing unspeakable atrocities. I have collected testimonies of survivors and have seen pictures from the violence of the guerrillas, which are impressive.”

“Secondly, guerrillas were divided into a hundred small groups. Some of these have come into Central Africa. The first place that was attacked was Obo, which is located on the border with Sudan, Central Africa, and the far north-eastern DRC. They looted the village and kidnapped 74 people. Most of these were later released, some after a year and a half in prison.

“Before Rafai, the guerrillas attacked the town of Zacko, where they had killed two people and kidnapped 55 young people, most of whom have been released. However, there are still 15 girls in the hands of the LRA,” says Bishop Aguirre Munos.

“Now the LRA fighters have taken root in Central Africa. Kony himself is thought to be hiding in the Central African territory. It is not clear how he is still able to escape capture, as they say he is sick and moves with a dozen women and several children.”

The Ugandan Army has sent a military contingent in Central Africa, with the consent of local authorities, to try to stop the guerrillas. “Important measures have been taken,” says Bishop Aguirre Munos. “A 4,000 meter-long runway has been built for air transport in Uganda, in addition to the obtaining of off-road vehicles and helicopters helicopters.”

“The LRA is a cult. When Kony is captured, I think the group will come to an end,” concluded Bishop Aguirre Munos. (L.M.) (Agenzia Fides 4/3/2010)