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AFRICA/CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC - LRA atrocities in Central Africa: Bishop of Bangassou tells Fides his testimony

Bangassou (Agenzia Fides) – The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), the Ugandan group which has been accused in Human Rights Watch's recent report of grave atrocities in the northeastern Democratic Republic of Congo, is also active in southern Sudan and the Central African Republic.
On March 21, a group of the LRA attacked the town of Rafai in southeastern Central Africa (see Fides 23/3/2010). His Excellency Bishop Juan Jose Aguirre Muños, Bishop of Bangassou, sent Fides the following report of the attack.
"The city of Rafai is located 150 km from Bangassou (Central Africa), the diocese where I have been Bishop for 12 years. Although Raphael means "medicine of God," on Sunday, March 21, Rafai became the prelude to brutality. Once again, it was carried out by the LRA (Lord's Resistance Army), which is not an army, does not represent any resistance, nor is it of the Lord, because they are simply barbaric criminals who trample my people, abduct children, rape and kill helpless civilians with total impunity.
When the small group of local policemen saw forty Ugandans riled up, tattooed, covered with “bullet-proof” apparel screaming at the top of their lungs, they had no desire to try and resist the attack. In Rafai, the LRA swept away lives and property of people like a steamroller running over grass. The guerrillas plundered granaries, burned houses, and “finished off” the wounded with machetes.
The night after the attack, the survivors were in the midst of collective hysteria and despair. The few who did not flee into the forest did not know whether the missing were in hiding or had been kidnapped. The day after, the Franciscan Father who runs the local mission organized the funeral for the victims, Catholics and Protestants together in the same grave, as the pastors of different churches had fled into the jungle. The Franciscan priest buried the 8 victims alone, swallowing tears and on the alert for any suspicious activity.
I sent a car to take 5 Congolese religious from the mission from out of that hellish scene. It is the second time in two weeks that I am forced to send for the sisters. The school where the nuns taught was closed temporarily until the LRA wants it or something is decided by those who can resolve this situation that has had us for 3 years in this desperate situation." (L.M.) (Agenzia Fides 29/3/2010)

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