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AFRICA/ DR CONGO - "We need help to resettle thousands of refugees in Equatorial Province" the Archbishop of Mbandaka tells Fides

Mbandaka (Agenzia Fides)- "We need the help of the UN, NGOs and the international community in general, to get the refugees caused by recent fighting in the west of the Democratic Republic of Congo back home" Fides was told by Archbishop Joseph Kumuondala Mbimba of Mbandaka, the main city of Equatorial Province in the north-west of the Democratic Republic of Congo, attacked on Easter Sunday 4 April by a group of rebels (see Fides 9/4/2010).

"Camped around Mbandaka are thousands of homeless people who fled the area of Budjala situated on the banks of the River Congo. Tens of thousands more, mainly from western Budjala, fled to the Republic of Congo (Congo Brazzaville)" Mgr Kumuondala Mbimba told Fides.

Two days ago the authorities of Brazzaville and Kinshasa met to discus the return of some 120,000 Congolese refugees at present camped in the area of Likouala, in north-east Congo Brazzaville. Local members of parliament say the refugees' presence is a threat to stability in the area. "The two governments intend to resolve as soon as possible the drama of Congolese refugees in Congo Brazzaville, however alone, the two countries lack the necessary resources to repatriate these people and guarantee them dignified living conditions " said Archbishop Kumuondala Mbimba. "It will in fact be necessary to repair or rebuild homes, schools and healthcare centres destroyed in the conflict. To do this we need the help of the international community".

So far western DRC has been spared the violence which devastated the east of the country. Since the end of 2009 a guerrilla group has been present Equatorial Province, a group connected at least initially with disputes between the Enyele and Monzaya communities for control of local lakes, rich in fish. Later however it became clear that the guerrilla group, known as Nzobo Yalobo (in Lingala "new military groups") has political motivation. The group leader is Ibrahim Mangbama. "This man is a Marabut, a guru, who uses psychological methods to incite his men convincing them that the strength he gives them is superior to that of their enemies " Mgr. Kumuondala Mbimba told Fides..

However the instability in Equatorial Province is more complex since it is connected to the fact that this is the homeland of the former dictator Mobutu (deposed in 1997) and of Jean-Pierre Bemba, principal antagonist of the DRC President Joseph Kabila. (L.M.) (Agenzia Fides 5/5/20109

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