



AFRICA/CENTRAL AFRICA - "LRA rebels are moving towards Darfur," Bishop of Bangassou tells Fides

Bangui (Agenzia Fides) - "The LRA rebels are moving towards the border with Darfur, Sudan," Fides has learned from Archbishop Juan José Aguirre Muños, Bishop of Bangassou, Central African Republic, where the rebels of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) have recently attacked the town of Birao in the north-east of the country. "I do not have direct news about what happened in Birao, which is 2,000 miles from Bangassou, but I know for a fact that the largest group of LRA fighters has left the area in my diocese to head north. Among them is probably their leader, Joseph Kony," said Bishop Muños.

According to the Bishop of Bangassou, the recent series of attacks carried out by the guerrillas reveals quite well their progression to the north. "In recent months, the rebels have attacked towns like Yalinga, then continuing north up to Birao, located in the far northeastern part of the country, on the border with Chad and Darfur, Sudan." The bishop continues: "It is an area without border control, where there are already other guerrilla groups from Central Africa operating."

The LRA, originally from northern Uganda, has become a regional problem because the guerrilla group especially targets, in addition to Central Africa, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Southern Sudan. "What saddens us most is that we know that among the LRA troops who attacked Birao there are several young girls and boys who had been kidnapped from areas of my diocese in recent months," said Bishop Muños. "There are about 11 who were kidnapped in Rafai and another 14 in Agouma. I know that some of them are still with the guerrillas because I heard the testimony of Germaine, a girl who managed to escape from the hands of the guerrillas and whom I later found after she had wandered for nine days in the forest to escape her captors."

Bishop Muños explains: "Germaine said she was kidnapped in March 2007 in Obo, in the eastern Central African Republic on the border with Democratic Republic of Congo. At the time, she was 15. In September of this year, she managed to escape. For three years, she was the sex slave of Kony, the LRA leader, which is why I think he is with the guerrilla group that is heading to Darfur."

"Germaine is now at a center in Bangassou. We hope she will be able to find the serenity of a normal life," concluded Bishop Muños. (L.M.) (Agenzia Fides 14/10/2010)